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AN AUTUMN PENITENT

Two novels by **MORLEY CALLAGHAN**









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An Autumn Penitent

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Macmillan of Canada / Toronto

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Morley Callaghan

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AN AUTUMN PENITENT

1

Joe Harding, at forty-seven, was plump and soft and a little bald, and having an easy time in Eastmount because he was a carpenter by trade, and there were only odd jobs for him. He had a large garden and carefully cultivated potato plants, but his wife, Lottie, was interested mainly in vegetables, like beets, peas, and tomatoes. Joe Harding's sixteen year-old niece, Ellen, every morning took the radial into the city to high school.

At one time the macadam highway from the city had extended only as far as the radial terminal a mile or so west of the village. The natural road was through the village in a line from the radial tracks down a sloping road between two heights of land, the road dipping down to an old river, its bed worn into a flat stretch of land. Houses were built along the road in the valley. Two roads crossed this main road, and houses had been built at the corner and a little ways up the intersections, as if people had intended these new roads to be streets one day. The main road crossed the river and climbed up the hill on the other side of the valley to the macadam highway; a handsome new road-house was there on the highway.

Down the river below the old Eastmount road was the big new high level bridge, massive steel and cement work spanning the whole valley. The new macadam road curved in an arc from the radial terminal along the height of land, across the high level bridge, missing the village on the ancient road through the valley.

On Friday evening after an early supper, Lottie, her white waist open at the throat, was slowly washing supper-dishes, a band of moisture on her forehead. Ellen, drying dishes, did not seem so hot. Joe sat by the window, looking indifferently into Henry's yard next door, at Lou Henry and her sloppy old mother squatting on their haunches on the back door-step, knees hunched up to their chins. Looking directly at Lottie he saw that she was hurrying, excited because Hodgins, the young man from the Baptist College in the city, was holding the first important service in the old barn down the road.

Ellen hung up the dish-towel on the pipe behind the stove and walked into the parlor, looking for something to do. Watching her, Joe knew she wasn't interested in going to service in the barn, and was pleased, and turned again to the window. Suddenly he felt uneasy, thinking of all the words the young evangelist might use while she sat on a bench for an hour listening to him. He didn't like thinking of it, and, anyway, was sure nothing would happen.

"Here's the paper-boy," he said, going to the kitchen door. The boy left two papers. Joe went into the front room and, taking off his shoes, stretched himself on the lounge near the window, preparing to enjoy himself. He started with the police-court news, turning later to the front page, then to the sporting page, reading every news item. He read slowly, but when recounting a murder trial, a political speech, or even a story of a parade, he felt that he had been close to these people who got their names in the papers, and he was caught in a stream of life swimming around him.

It was getting dark in the front room so he selected five or six stories from the papers. Putting on his shoes he went into the kitchen. He sat down at the kitchen table. Mrs. Harding was combing her hair in front of the mirror over the sink.

"Listen Lottie," he said. "This is worth reading." He spread the paper on the table.

He read one of the six stories selected from the papers. Lottie listened, commenting tersely, while she combed her hair. They talked about the story: a man had imprisoned his young wife in his cellar after binding and gagging her and had disappeared. The imprisoned wife had no reasonable explanation of her husband's actions. Joe looked at the matter from all angles as if he understood the difficulty between the young woman and her husband. Then he read another story.

Almost every night he read stories from the papers to Lottie and Ellen. He liked it better if Ellen were there because her imagination was lively and she was emotional.

After reading the stories he said casually: "I guess I'll go and sit on the front porch. May go down the road for a little while."

He sat on the front porch. There were no sounds on the road. Looking over the tops of houses on the road, he could see the high level bridge spanning the valley, an automobile moving across; then he wondered where Ellen had gone after drying the dishes. She might have gone over to see Doris Kremer, he thought, remembering how he had seen the two of them last night when he came home from the hotel. Ellen had been talking to a young fellow under a light on the road. They had walked down the road still under the light, but going toward Fraser's orchard. He had felt like hurrying after them to tell the fellow to go chase himself. She had passed out of the light into the shadow and looked full grown. The fellow might have been Zip Foster, who smoked cigars and tried to interest older men around the hotel with smutty stories about young girls in the neighborhood. Zip wore a derby hat when he went into the city. Joe could still hear his loud laugh accompanying the story about poor Rose MacIntyre.

Down the road, a man was standing at the entrance to the barn, and, watching him, Joe's thoughts were inter-

rupted. He had helped fix up the barn, his carpentry useful in the making of rough benches. They had worked many evenings after supper. The tall barn, big and old, was back a ways from where the road began to climb up the hill to the road-house and almost opposite the Hardings'. The barn was a stone's throw from the river and in the night-time could hardly be seen from the road, overshadowed as it was by one of the wooded hills, humping up in the valley. The board walls were weather-warped and a wind blew through the cracks. The barn smelt of manure, though horses had not been in it for a year.

Before it had got dark, Ellen and Doris Kremer, a skinny, dark girl, had come over from Kremers' place to watch the men fixing the barn. Ellen's dress, a little tight at the bosom, outlined her breast, and he remembered clearly how she had leaned against the door. Now he felt uneasy.

Lottie called from the kitchen and he answered almost nervously. He went into the kitchen. Lottie smiled encouragingly, pleased because he was going with them to the service. She looked good in her black silk dress with the long sleeves, and her hair parted in the centre. He put on his coat. He heard Ellen coming down-stairs and wondered why he had thought she had gone out.

2

The three of them walked down the road to the barn. Many people coming along the road nodded to Lottie, for it was understood Hodgins relied on her judgment and thought her an excellent woman. Lottie bowed politely and gracefully. There was a warm glow in the sky. It would not be really dark for an hour, but in the barn it was almost dark. The windows were small and far apart. Joe

and Lottie and Ellen sat on a bench three rows from the front.

On the platform, enlarged since Joe had helped erect it, were two rows of empty chairs in an arc. Three lanterns swinging from a beam at the roof and two lamps on posts at each side of the barn gave a pale yellow light. The horsey smell had not left the barn and seemed to come from under the rough worn floor. People came in the wide door, walking uncertainly, unaccustomed as yet to the rough benches and stable odors and the yellow lights at the roof. Joe knew all these people who sat down awkwardly and whispered.

Mr. Hodgins, smiling with agreeable determination, came in with Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Simpson. Most of the benches were soon filled. Over a hundred people sat on the hard benches and watched Mr. Hodgins smile encouragingly at Harvey Simpson and take the short steps to the platform.

Joe said to Ellen, "Do you know how they go ahead?" He didn't know why he whispered.

"We sing soon," Ellen said, not too seriously.

Hodgins began to talk pleasantly about the progress of evangelical work in the village and how it was time for many to make an open profession of faith. The young man cleared his throat, turned quickly the pages of a hymn-book, and nodded amiably to Mrs. Kremer, sitting at the piano on the floor to the right of the platform, her hand holding down and creasing a page in the hymn-book. The piano looked simply splendid in the barn, Joe thought. Everybody stood up, coughing and clearing throats. Mrs. Kremer pounded a chord, glanced alertly at Mr. Hodgins, nodded, and then looked encouragingly at the people on the benches. Hodgins started the singing, pumping his arm up and down regularly, vigorously.

*"There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold."*

Joe did not have a good voice but made a gruff, friendly noise in his throat. Lottie and Ellen shared the same hymn-book, Lottie singing seriously, her voice rising strongly. Ellen had a good voice, Joe thought.

"But one was out in the hills far away."

Mr. Hodgins began to talk in a low, confidential tone and Joe counted the chairs on the platform. Twenty-five chairs on the platform. He glanced at Lottie sitting stiffly on the hard bench, but Hodgins's rising voice cleared away his thoughts. Hodgins, a young man at the University, had thought only of having his hair slicked back. "I used to think a good deal of my hair," he said sadly, his large hand brushing back the black hair that stood up stiffly. His face was sallow in the lamplight. At one time he had flaunted himself before women, he said. In the even tone of his voice the word "women" had an emphasis like the crack of a whip.

Hodgins leaned forward, his lips moving quickly. Flinging his arms wide, he offered to lay bare his soul. At one time he had kept company with a girl in her teens who was very fond of him. That girl's father had one evening accused him of leading her into dark places where the young soul longed for the fleshpots. He had said to the father of the girl "I haven't dragged her down, but I will lift her up in spite of you," and he had lifted her up and was going to marry the girl.

Joe, though certain he was smiling good-naturedly, couldn't prevent himself thinking seriously of Ellen, and the evening they had walked down to the beach. For a single moment he thought of Hodgins and himself as one, then, resenting it, he looked around seriously, almost believing people were fully aware that Hodgins was practically talking to him alone. Remote, and far away, he saw himself standing up there beside Hodgins and talking rapidly, and he muttered to himself, "For God's

sake, don't be such a damn fool." Then he got in the frame of mind where he could see and hear distinctly without feeling the force of words.

Everybody on the benches was interested in Hodgins's one time proximity to sins of the flesh. Joe was vaguely pleased to hear that Hodgins had been accused of carnalities, and, feeling more comfortable on the bench, wished he could have seen the girl.

Hodgins was telling a story about a little boy from Galilee, his voice controlled, pauses giving time and movement to his words. Joe, looking out of the corner of his eye at Lottie and the people around him, was sure something was going to happen that would startle him into talking out loud. Everybody was leaning forward watching Hodgins, and intensely interested in the story of the little boy from Galilee.

Hodgins droned rhythmically. "He went out and was beaten and stoned, and was robbed. He went out and was beaten and stoned, and was robbed." His face, yellow in the lamplight, assumed a fierce expression, but his voice grew softer. Joe, fidgeting with his hat, thought something inside him would crack. "What would you have done?" Hodgins asked mildly. "You would have cringed," he said suddenly. He yelled, "You would have cringed, cringed." He bawled, "You would have cringed."

Joe nervously avoided Hodgins bulging eyes. Many people in shame bowed their heads, admitting they would have cringed. A few women, crying softly, muttered, and shook their heads sadly. Joe wished Lottie would do something, move or speak, instead of sitting there motionless and tense. Hodgins was talking of hell.

Had any one in the barn grasped fully the significant warning and awful terror in the threat of hell to the wilful sinner whose brazen carnalities jeered at an omnipotent God who would exact a vengeance awful in its completeness and just to the smallest degree? Had any one heard the screams of the suffering in a hospital? Had any

one beheld the skin being slowly eaten away from the flesh of a mortal afflicted with leprosy, or a corpse green and dank, eaten by worms and rotting away?

A woman gasped and Joe wished he was outside in the cool air. Hodgins turned quickly to Mrs. Kremer and told her to strike up a hymn. The hymn was started nervously and taken up eagerly. Between the stanzas the piano had a hollow, lonesome sound in the big barn.

Hodgins walked back and forth on the platform, his eyes on the boards, his hand slowly brushing through his hair. "Beaten and stoned, and robbed and crucified," he was muttering while they sang. "And yet what would they out there have done?"

"Bringing in the sheaves, Bringing in the sheaves."

Before the hymn was over, Hodgins stopped moving restlessly on the platform and shouted, "Who will walk with me in the path of the Master? Who? Who? With me? With me?"

Lottie was breathing heavily, shifting her weight, getting ready to stand up and go forward, her eyes rolling, and showing the whites. She stood up trembling, but Mrs. Harvey Simpson got up quickly and went forward to Hodgins, who leaned from the platform, waiting, his hand stretched out. He took her by the hand and helped her up to the platform. "A helping hand to you, sister," he said.

Lottie flushed angrily, jealous of Mrs. Harvey Simpson, the first to be saved, and sat down sullenly, then, recovering her composure, got up and followed Mrs. Simpson to the platform. She sat next to Mrs. Simpson on one of the chairs in the arc.

Ellen's face was colorless and her hands were folded in her lap. She made no effort to follow Aunt Lottie and did not look at Uncle Joe.

A young girl with pale face and big blue eyes went up to the platform and sat down beside Mrs. Harvey Simpson

and Lottie. Hodgins kept urging all to come forward. The lamplight at the roof flickered and shadows waved over the platform. Hodgins started to sing a hymn in a loud voice and Mrs. Kremer played the piano. Everybody stood up mechanically and started singing. Joe, wondering what Hodgins would do next, heard him yell, "Who will come? Who will come?" as he stepped down from the platform.

Harvey Simpson went up to the platform smiling weakly at Hodgins, who helped him eagerly, the first man to go forward. Joe had never liked Harvey Simpson very much.

Hodgins stood in the aisle repeating rapidly, "I want young men, strong young men," but there were few young men in the barn.

The four on the platform looked straight out over the people standing up, seeing nothing, apparently hearing nothing.

Hodgins moved along the aisle, then stood still, suddenly realizing that the hymn was over and everybody was standing up. He wheeled and stuck out his arm at a short, red-faced farmer standing near the aisle. "How about you?" he said, pointing his finger full in the man's face. "Will you? Will you? Will you walk with me?" The farmer's hand twitched at his side and his lips moved weakly. "I dunno," he said hopelessly, but he shook his head twice and awkwardly shuffled up to the platform and sat down nervously beside the others.

Joe wanted to sit down, or go out and walk home and read the paper and was sorry he had come. He was afraid Hodgins would point his finger at him and Lottie would be offended when, before all the neighbors, he refused to move. He had his mind made up to refuse to sit on the platform.

They were all standing up, a self-conscious, hesitant audience. Hodgins walked back to the platform and impatiently waited for some one to go forward. He stood there with his arms stretched out, silent. Three women walked up to the platform.

"A helping hand to you, sister, and you, and you, too."

Joe wanted to sit down. Women were muttering, crying and sniffing, and he looked around at the hard, empty benches. Beside him a thin woman, gripping and twisting her fingers, muttered incoherently, could not bring herself to go up to the platform. "Oh Lord, dear Lord," she said, trying, but unable to move toward the platform. The thin woman, so miserable, and Lottie sitting on the platform in the depressing silence, made Joe unhappy. In the barn there were over a hundred people and he wondered why only ten had gone up to the platform. Some men were pale and some women were crying, but they would not answer Hodgins's insistent appeal.

After singing and exhorting and praying for three quarters of an hour, Hodgins had twenty people on the platform, filling most of the chairs in the arc. One of the women was humming audibly, "We will be saved, we will be saved."

The restless excitement had gone out of Joe's thoughts, and he knew everybody in the barn felt more comfortable because Hodgins was apparently satisfied and interested mainly in the twenty willing souls on the platform. He walked across the platform counting slowly, the eyes of the twenty following him closely.

Leaning over to Ellen, Joe whispered jokingly, "It ain't too late yet, Ellen." He wanted to be funny so she would not be too seriously interested, but Ellen shook her head doggedly, watching Aunt Lottie intently. Then she glanced at Hodgins moving across the platform. Joe felt silly and out of place, sitting there on the bench when everybody else appeared to be interested. He had been interested earlier in the evening when something inside had been moved by music and words and Hodgins's arm beating time, but it was all gone now and he was losing interest.

The twenty on the platform were told to move close to the edge, and all knelt down together. Hodgins knelt down too and they prayed, repeating slowly Hodgins's words, but

Joe, feeling suddenly lonely and unhappy, wished he could have taken Lottie home away from the platform and the people in the arc. But he knew she was pleased to be there and had looked forward to it.

"It's no good now, it's all over," he said to Ellen.

"Sh, sh, sh," Ellen whispered.

The prayer finished, Hodgins arose and the others arose and sat on their chairs. Hodgins called for a certain hymn. Mrs. Kremer struck the piano keys twice and everybody was ready. On the platform and on the floor they stood up and sang the hymn.

They came out of the barn quietly. The twenty men and women on the platform hardly spoke to each other until they had stepped down from the platform and were outside. Hodgins was tired but satisfied. Joe and Ellen, standing together at the door, waited for Lottie to come down from the platform. Lottie looked tired but smiled happily at Joe and Ellen.

Joe took Lottie's arm to comfort her, then noticed that Ellen had moved away.

She was a few yards up the path, talking to Doris Kremer, who had not been to church. Doris was coaxing Ellen to do something, pulling her sleeve, explaining impatiently. Ellen hesitated and would have followed Aunt Lottie and Uncle Joe, who were passing, but Doris held her arm. Lottie, passing, reminded Ellen that it looked like rain.

As they walked slowly he could see up the hill farther a pale haze of light hanging over the city of Toronto. Some one was coming down the road, footfalls sounding loud, and he did not feel like meeting anybody. He noticed the Anglican Church steeple sticking up over the crescent curve of the hill. The hooting of the ten o'clock train curving along the lake front irritated him. He remembered vaguely that his father was buried somewhere on the hill, a good Anglican who had not wanted him to marry Lottie, a Methodist. Nobody in the village

now cared very much about religion at marriage unless it was Mrs. Moore, who never forgot she was a Catholic.

He was holding Lottie's arm firmly, aware that she was making some inconsequential remark, but was experiencing a weary feeling of disgust, something like he had felt years ago when, a young man, he had been sitting on his bed reading of three trials he had been following closely. Three girls escaping from a city jail had accidentally strangled the matron. He had sympathized with the girls until the trial, when the papers told they were diseased. In the same paper he read of the trial in Windsor of a pretty young wife who had shot her illicit lover on account of becoming diseased. In another part of the paper was the story of a young man who had killed his wife rather than have her bear a child who too would have inherited the taint, and his head had felt queer, and then he had got very dizzy.

He held Lottie's arm much tighter, and, noticing it, she smiled. They were at the front porch. They went through the kitchen. Joe lit the lamp. Lottie put her hat on the table and sat on a chair. Joe, looking at her, decided to be agreeable.

"I think I'd like a nice cup of tea," she said thoughtfully.

"All right. Maybe you got some cake, too."

"Look in the pantry, eh Joe."

He went out to the pantry and returned with a big piece of layer-cake left over from supper.

"I'm kind of hungry," he said.

"Not all that, Joe."

"No use saving it."

"It might do to-morrow, put a little back."

He cut the big piece in two and put one half back in the pantry. Lottie did not want any cake.

"How would you like to light the heater and put the water on?" she said.

He filled the big copper kettle with water, lit the oil

stove and took the teapot, shook it and poured a little water in to move the dregs from the bottom, and went to shake the pot in the sink.

"Go outside, Joe," Lottie said.

So he went out through the wood-shed to the door-step and jerkily shook the pot to throw the tea leaves in the yard.

They sat down at the table and drank tea, but Joe didn't feel hungry and couldn't eat the cake. She talked about the Harvey Simpsons and Joe listened patiently.

"I thought I heard rain on the windows," she said, looking up peacefully.

He said suddenly, "Ellen should be in. You know she should be."

They heard the front door open and Ellen came along the hall into the kitchen. Without looking directly at her he knew she had been hurrying, for she was puffing. A few drops of rain had fallen on her fawn dress. The toes of her canvas shoes were wet.

"Where you been, girlie?"

"Over at the barn. Doris and I, we took a walk. It's not ten yet."

She went over to the window and pressed her face against the pane. "It's sure raining hard, we just missed it," she said.

Lottie asked casually where Doris and Ellen had gone walking and Ellen, still looking out the window, answered evasively. Joe was disappointed, a little excited because she had answered evasively.

The rain came down hard. It pattered against the windows and drummed on the woodshed. A wind had come up from the lake.

"You better see all the windows are closed, Joe," Lottie said.

He got up slowly. "I'll have to light another lamp," he said.

He lit the lamp and closed all the windows, and the

three of them sat near the stove, as they did in the cold winter. He began to feel uncomfortable because Ellen didn't look happy or have much to say. He would have liked to talk to her but could think of nothing interesting and she wouldn't look at him. Three of them sitting together around the stove and Lottie the only one at all comfortable. Everything had been satisfactory until Ellen came in; the tea had been good; Lottie had been agreeable and contented. He had wanted Ellen to come in but now he was disappointed and sure Hodgins, who had no business talking that way, was responsible for Ellen's unhappiness. It was all right for old women, but a young girl had to live and enjoy life.

Lottie yawned, stretched lazily in the chair, very tired, then got up abruptly and said a good sleep was just what she needed. Joe thought suddenly that he would be alone in the kitchen with Ellen and would have a long talk with her, but she said casually that she might as well go to bed too.

Lottie and Ellen went up-stairs together. Joe sat there stroking his cheek with his right hand, and decided that if he were only hungry he would feel better, so he went into the pantry to cut a big slice of cake, then lit the oil stove again. Restless and tired of waiting, he poured tea and some milk in a cup and put in sugar. The water was starting to boil. "That stove's no good," he thought. "Lottie should have a new stove to cook on, a big oil stove." He poured the water in the cup and sipped it. Too much sugar. He threw it in the sink and made another cup of tea to suit him and sat down at the table and ate the cake slowly, for he was not really hungry. The tea tasted good. Lottie always had good tea. He was a long time eating the piece of cake.

So he could get into bed quickly, he took off his shirt in the kitchen and put his foot on the stove-damper to unlace his boot. One of his shoelaces was knotted, and he swore quietly. The knot bothered him but he got it. Carry-

ing his shirt in his arm, and in his stocking feet, he went up-stairs. Lottie was asleep.

3

Joe stretched himself flat on the sloping roofs, heels against a scantling rest. The sun was not shining on this north side of the roof and it was cool lying on the shingles where the roof caved from age. Joe had re-shingled a good section of that side of the roof, the new shingles standing out like an ochre blotch on the dark brown of the old shingles. Lying on the roof, he liked the fresh cedar smell from the new wood.

He had done a good four hours' work for Milburn, two in the morning, two in the afternoon, and was in no hurry to go down from the roof. If Hen Milburn had been at home he would have gone to talk to him, but he didn't feel like talking to Mrs. Milburn, who never had much to say. Joe looked down into MacIntyre's back yard next door; a queer family, one of the queerest in Eastmount, but nobody bothered about them. It occurred to Joe that a man could go on doing anything he wanted to do in Eastmount, providing he had been doing it for some time.

Rose MacIntyre came into the yard to hang clothes on the line. She'd pin a part of a garment on the line, holding a clothespin in her mouth for another part. In her big apron, uncombed dun-colored hair, her indefinite features and freckled cheeks twisted out of shape by clothespins in her mouth, Rose was not much to look at.

Joe wondered could Rose see him lying there on the roof. She was interesting, in a disreputable way, of course. Everybody knew she had been taken down to the beach, up in the hills, and in her own parlor by most men in the village, but never nasty, never charging a cent, she rarely offended even religious people in the village. Rose was no

good, but everybody had long ago decided she was no good; there could be no difficulty or fuss about her. And she didn't look so bad with her face powdered and hair tidied.

Rose, looking up at the sun, the clothespins in her mouth, saw Joe Harding on Milburn's roof. She took the clothespins from her mouth, used one on the line, and waved her hand at him. "Having a rest, Mr. Harding?" she said.

Joe sat up. "Hello, Rose, how are you?"

"Why don't you come down if you're through?" she said.

"It's nice up here, it's comfortable."

Rose moved over from the clothes-line to the apple-tree. "Do you want an apple?" she said, reaching up to a branch.

"They're too green, ain't they, Rose?"

She picked an apple from the tree and tossed it up to the roof but rolled in a wide arc beyond his reach, falling off the front of the roof. Rose tossed up another apple that bounced over Joe's head, but he caught it rolling down. He didn't want to sink his teeth too quickly in the hard green apple, his plate might come loose. Sitting up he scraped the skin with his teeth and took a small bite. It had a sour, unpleasant taste, but he didn't like to throw it away because Rose was watching him.

"You ain't got any salt down there, eh Rose?" he said jokingly.

"How'd you like me to go in and get the salt cellar and toss it up?" she said willingly.

"Naw, don't be crazy, Rose. I don't need to eat the apple," Joe said.

"I got to go in now anyway." She grinned going in the house, and attempted to kick her leg suggestively, but her long flowing apron spoiled the effect. Joe grinned to himself, sliding along the roof to the left, going down to the ground. On the ladder he was thinking of Rose. She was tough but friendly.

Picking up his tools he thought of people saying Rose had always been immoral. No one seemed to remember a time when she had not been loose and eager for it, though only about four years older than Ellen. Her mother hadn't been much good; her two older brothers had used Rose for a good time as soon as she was old enough to perform such a service for them. No one knew why Rose had never had a baby. Some men in the village appreciated Rose's discretion in this matter, and, when with her, used more confident methods.

Joe rapped at Milburn's back door to tell Mrs. Milburn the job was done. Mrs. Milburn, a tired, solemn-faced, gray woman, said Henry would pay Mr. Harding when he came home. Henry would take it over to Mr. Harding, or maybe send over one of the children.

On the way home Joe found himself again thinking of Rose MacIntyre, a few years older than his niece, much harder, much tougher. Zip Foster had a few stories to tell about Rose and hadn't he seen Zip and Ellen walking over to the orchard? It mightn't have been Zip, but it looked like him under the light. What was there to prevent Ellen turning out like Rose, Joe thought nervously. The MacIntyre brothers were good-for-nothings but he was respectable—that was the difference. Joe felt like meeting Zip Foster, who had gone off to the city, and taking him by the neck to find out if he had gone into the orchard with Ellen. If it hadn't been Zip he would feel silly. Joe was sweating at the forehead. He picked up a stick and knocked it impatiently against his boot as he walked.

He walked faster. If he had wanted some one younger than Lottie, what was wrong with Rose, who would have been willing, and the affair would have offended no one. Rose, with her warm comfortable body and moist, loose lips. Rose should have gone into the city if she was going in for it and wanted to be a whore. Thinking of the young and easy-going Rose in this way made Joe forget temporarily about Ellen. He decided none of the

MacIntyres had any ambition. That was the trouble with Rose. He was now walking slower. It was funny that Rose could be living next door to Hen Milburn, the constable.

He tried to keep on thinking of Rose, but couldn't; she became Ellen no matter how he tried to direct his thoughts. And he was afraid of thinking too much about Ellen. Sometimes he was miserable and cursed himself, but other times, restless, he thought again of walking down to the beach. Just the same he was glad Ellen was going to church with Lottie. If Rose had been able to go to church and had been scared young, maybe she would have grown up respectable.

Some one was coming down the road. Joe saw Hodgins coming toward him.

"How do you do, Mr. Hodgins."

"How do you do, Mr. Harding. Lovely weather we're having."

"Yeah, we're having lovely weather."

Hodgins smiled encouragingly at Joe. "I was pleased, really pleased to see you at the service the other night. How did you like it?"

"I liked it fine."

Hodgins looked at Joe steadily and said solemnly, "Let's be frank with each other, Mr. Harding."

"Sure, Mr. Hodgins, I never thought we ain't."

"Well then, did it get inside you the other night? Did you feel something moving around inside that had to come out?"

"In a kind of way," Joe said, embarrassed.

"Good, that's all right. That something inside you gets bigger and you just have to let it out. That's when you know it's time to go forward and profess. See?"

"Well, 'tain't quite that way with me yet."

"You'll be all right, Mr. Harding."

For a moment Joe thought of talking to Hodgins about Ellen but grew resentful suddenly and decided it was none

of Hodgins's business. They parted amicably. Joe got home just in time for supper.

As soon as he came into the kitchen, Lottie said she wanted to go swimming after supper. Ellen and Doris were going down to the lake together. Joe wouldn't promise to go swimming but was willing to go down to the beach afterward and meet Lottie, if she would go swimming with Doris and Ellen.

Lottie had some fine pancakes and maple syrup for supper. Joe liked the pancakes so much he said he might go swimming after all.

Lottie, in good spirits, was a little excited. Mr. Hodgins had called to talk over a plan for a baptism in a month or two and had asked her advice on the time and place. She had been so pleased. Sitting in the parlor he had talked as he had never talked before, imagining himself preaching down by the water, taking his people one by one to be baptized in the lake. He had assured Lottie a report of such a baptism would spread across the country and a small host would be there to see the chosen ones accept the Lord, a Christian demonstration to be remembered for years in the country. He had asked Lottie confidentially how many she thought would be ready for baptism in a month or two. They had carefully considered the religious tendencies of all who at any time had been to service in the barn.

Lottie told Joe she felt sure Ellen would be ready and willing for baptism, she would see to that. Hodgins had asked for eager young people. But she was a little disappointed that Hodgins had not stayed for supper.

Joe, pleased and happy, was sure everything would be all right between Ellen and him because he was sincere and would not be merely temporarily excited by a religious ceremony.

"How does it strike you, Ellen?" he asked.

"Oh, Aunt Lottie seems to think it would be a good thing," she said, slightly interested.

Lottie had been talking to Ellen, arousing her lively imagination by a picture of a host on the beach awaiting the ritual of the baptism. Ellen had even promised half-heartedly to try and interest Doris Kremer. Mr. Hodgins wanted eager young people.

After supper Lottie and Joe put long coats over their bathing-suits and walked down to the lake. Joe, in good humor, laughed merrily and was sober when Lottie started talking about baptism. He was always interested in anything that interested her, he explained, and was glad she had made up her mind to influence Ellen at a time when the girl was at an impressionable age. Joe knew the baptism would be the strong thought in her life of the next few months.

They were walking down the river, Joe holding Lottie's arm, walking her so briskly she said, "Joe you got to stop, you got to stop pulling."

"Step lively there, young lady," Joe said affably, "you'd think you were an old married woman."

"Stop, Joe, be sensible, don't be so silly."

"Come on, Lottie, get moving."

The water was warm and they had a good swim. Everybody enjoyed it. Joe and Doris and Ellen and Lottie were all happy, because the water was warm and Joe was feeling jolly. When Joe was in a jolly mood everybody was in good humor. After swimming they sat on a log on the beach in the moonlight and Joe told a number of stories with unusual endings.

In bed, however, Joe found himself thinking of Rose MacIntyre. He did not care how much he thought about Rose, but wanted to avoid thinking of Ellen going to bed in the room down the hall.

By the middle of August Hodgins had established himself securely in the village, and Lottie displayed to the neighbors a triumphant indulgence. Joe too had come to regard the old barn as something attached to his family, though he would not take part in the services. The Rev. John Adams and the Methodist Church had lost prestige: everybody now admitted Hodgins was more interesting, and many people who called themselves Methodists went to service in the barn, disgusting the Rev. John Adams. Only old incorrigible Methodists spoke bitterly of the Baptist intrusion. The baptism in the lake, the second Sunday in September, promised to be far too interesting to be disregarded.

Joe still refused to be baptized, but Hodgins told Lottie her example would be a strong influence, likely to affect him at the last moment. Though Joe admired Lottie's skilful suggestions that had persuaded Ellen to look forward to the baptism in the lake, he was merely amused when the same influence was brought to bear on him. The thought of Ellen's baptism gave Joe a feeling of security he had not enjoyed for some time. He said to himself Lottie would be completely satisfied with her success and he could live as securely in his old way. It was better to have the thoughts of Lottie and Ellen definitely attached to some idea, a kind of rudder for them in every-day life.

"I'd just as soon see you and Ellen go to church," he said to Lottie.

"You didn't always say that, Joe," she said.

"No, but it's best, a woman and girl should have something."

Lottie was delighted to hear Joe talking like that; he was progressing, his thoughts trying to fit into the proper groove, and she told Hodgins of the conversation. He was pleased and urged her to bring pressure in the small intimate matters between them, not obtrusively, never nag-

ging, but with a kindness and a human understanding that would bring home to him the necessity of a spiritual compact between them. Lottie did try talking intimately to Joe, tried to come to an understanding, and was not discouraged when he laughed amiably.

Joe said that he did not want Ellen to get too excited about the baptism nor come too much under Hodgins's influence, and though encouraging her interest, he was disappointed to see her giving up careless easy ways for the strict manner of a young lady of religious practice. It did not become Ellen, who was quick, light, restless, but it was the best thing that could happen to her. Joe often thought it was best she should not fool around with the young fellows in the village.

The summer continued hot and for the most part dry; a week's rain would help the crops. The harvest apples were ripening. Joe and Jerry Hammond were dickering with Ab Fraser to buy the apples in his orchard for a venture in the City. At this time Lottie quarrelled with Lou Henry and they exchanged bad words. Lou called Lottie a lousy old hypocrite and Lottie said Lou was a filthy disgrace to the neighborhood. Georgie Henry was to blame. He had hidden behind a tree and yelled "Old lady Harding, old lady Harding," and thumbed his nose at her. Georgie was a terror. Lottie indignantly insisted Joe call on Mr. Henry, but Joe said it was no use; if they were no good, they were no good, and that was all there was to it. Lottie had tried talking over the fence to Lou with unhappy results, and, being a nervous woman, had gone in the house and cried bitterly.

Next day Joe found out the Henrys were moving in the early fall. He was glad to tell Lottie, but was in a way sorry to see the Henrys go, having always been interested in the vacillating interests of Lou's sloppy mother. He might come down the road one day and find every window-sill in the Henry house holding a flower pot, and then a month later the flower pots would disappear and

the old lady would take to bird cages, and canaries would sing on the porch in the back yard beside the hencoops. The old lady had never been able to irritate Joe, though she had leered at him from the window, looking for trouble. It was too bad they were going. They knew how to look after potatoes and had laughed at Hodgins.

August was nearly over and the Henrys were moving into the City. Lottie and Joe sat up one night, talking over the peculiar history of the family, and Lottie was interested, now they were going. Lottie did not bear a grudge; she simply did not like the Henrys. The night they were talking about the Henrys, Lottie contrasted the good-for-nothing George with Ellen, who was trying to increase her spiritual value to the community, and said it was entirely a matter of home training.

"Ellen's more serious-minded now," she said.

"I don't know as that's so good," said Joe.

"It makes her a better girl."

"Oh, I suppose it keeps her out of harm. That's all I care."

Ellen, helping Hodgins in little ways, forming a Ladies' Auxiliary and singing in the church, was pleased to be considered worthy of being treated as a woman. Lottie now talked just like Mr. Hodgins, whenever she remembered to do so. Joe thought it extraordinary she should be able to remember so many of Hodgins's words and phrases.

Hodgins knew Joe did not want to go to church and there was no use arguing about it. Joe went for long walks with Ellen, since she no longer encouraged attention but tried to be friendly, reserved, and obedient. Too often she was almost servile to Lottie. Once, with quiet simplicity, she told Joe Lottie had been wronged and they should do all in their power to please her. Joe had agreed with her but had at the same time laughed easily, intimating the incident was old and was after all a silly incident, and since it had passed without trouble there was no use thinking or talking about it. Joe was glad he had been able

to talk so clearly to Ellen, even though he hadn't quite convinced her.

He had not been able to forget the incident as easily as he would have had Ellen believe. Ellen was young. Often he found himself thinking of young women. There were nights he tossed restlessly in his bed, thinking of Ellen sleeping in her room down the hall, and he tried to think of Rose MacIntyre, warm and comfortable and easy-going, young, good-natured and willing, but in the daytime he never talked to Rose or paid any attention to her.

He was sympathetic and good-natured to Lottie. He would rather have been decent with Lottie than with any one else in the world and was willing to humor her whims. One night, going to bed, Lottie, coaxing, asked Joe to kneel down and pray with her. Joe said, "Aw no, Lottie, we'll pray if you want when we get in bed." But, insisting, she said not for years had he tried to please her in such a way. In their nightgowns, they were standing on the old carpet in the bedroom, the sheets rolled down on the big wooden bed, and Joe was trying to make a joke of it, but Lottie was sullenly disappointed and Joe said finally he would kneel down if she would turn out the light. He couldn't explain why he wanted the light turned out. Lottie smiled understandingly and reached over to the little table at the head of the bed and blew out the light. Joe sometimes hated the understanding smile. She had never smiled like that until a few months ago. He knelt down awkwardly and put his elbows on the bed and Lottie knelt with her back straight, repeating the Lord's prayer out loud. Moonlight coming through the window shone on the soles of their bare feet, toes on the ground, heels in the air. Lottie was praying and Joe was hating Hodgins but after a moment thought it didn't matter and let thoughts slip easily through his head.

They got into bed together, Lottie putting her arm around Joe's back, and saying happily, "You did it for me, Joe, and I'm so glad, Joe." And Joe wondered if she

would tell Hodgins to come around and talk confidentially as he had done after Joe had advised Lottie to encourage Ellen to go to church because religion was a good thing for a girl.

After the night they had knelt down and prayed, Lottie humored Joe's slightest whim, avoided arguing with him, gave in to him every time there was a difference of opinion. He did not like it. He had liked the arguments with Lottie, as for example those following her terse comment on a story he read from the newspaper after supper while she went on with her housework, but she now listened carefully, apparently highly valued his remarks, and seemed to have advised Ellen to humor Uncle Joe. He was disappointed but could not talk to Lottie about it, so he went over to the hotel as much as possible and drank home brew with Ike Kremer, Jerry Hammond, and Reggie McGinn. Lottie had formerly been accustomed to seeing him really lit up once a week but now he felt obliged never to go home drunk.

At the hotel they talked about the baptism and Dan Higgins thought it very funny. Ike was going to be baptized but said a religious ceremony had nothing to do with wanting a little beer occasionally. Everybody in the village was talking about the baptism, which was to be in two weeks' time, though it was not definitely known just who were to be baptized. In the arguments at the hotel, Joe steered a middle course between the views of Jerry Hammond and Ike Kremer, pointing out he could sympathize with Ike and yet understand Jerry. He was pleased he could really feel that way. Jerry joshingly explained Joe had to talk like that because of his wife. The arguments never got too personal because they all liked the beer better than the argument.

Sometimes Joe thought he could see a change in Ellen. She was more nervous than usual, too easily excited. At first he thought it the excitement of doing what she considered important religious work for Hodgins but decided

that wouldn't make her so impatient, so willing to quarrel without provocation. She was keeping to herself, though still earnestly interested in the baptism. She began to avoid Joe, but was eager for Lottie's company and they walked together in the evening arm in arm, went to church together, and seemed very intimate.

Joe decided it was no use worrying about Ellen. It was all over and there was no use thinking about it. He wasn't going to think about it no matter what had happened. But nothing could happen because he never encouraged her and did not want to feel like it. He had encouraged her to go to church.

Every night now at the supper table something was said about the baptism. So much talk about it irritated Joe and once he referred jokingly to it as the social event of the year. Such a frivolous attitude annoyed Lottie, but Joe had made up his mind to be independent, though willing to please and encourage her. He had assured himself a little cold water thrown on Lottie's enthusiasm would prevent her from becoming fanatical, and was determined to make it hard to talk too long about religion by changing the subject as often as possible. So they still talked about the neighbors and the things happening during the day.

Near the end of August Lottie was excited for two days over three magazine salesmen working their way through college who had devoted three days to Eastmount and the rurals. One of the young men had stuck his foot in Lottie's door, preventing her from closing it. Lottie had indignantly pushed him away and the fellow had pushed her back in the hall. Lottie had threatened to get the constable. The three young men had cleared out that night. It was something to talk about. Lottie was excited and eager to tell Joe when he came home. They talked about it for an hour. For two or three days she never mentioned the baptism but talked to the neighbors about the magazine salesmen.

But the salesmen were soon forgotten and Lottie turned to interviewing neighbors, soliciting subscriptions for a building fund for a new church. Hodgins had asked a few of the prominent workers in his small congregation to see what could be done about it. Remembering the fuss Joe had made the time she had wished to make a small donation, she guardedly mentioned the subscription to him and was agreeably surprised when he said they would not lag behind the neighbors, if everybody was giving something. He said he would give one-half of his profits from the joint venture with Jerry Hammond in the apple market.

Lottie was slightly disappointed. She didn't approve of Joe and Jerry buying Ab Fraser's apples, because she did not think that Jerry was reliable and she knew Joe would not work too hard. But Joe was not stingy. Everybody in Eastmount spoke of him as a generous-hearted man and she knew if he was in good humor he would not have her make a niggardly donation to the church.

5

Jerry Hammond's head appeared between two branches and he brushed away the leaves with his hands, climbing up another rung on the ladder to yell at Joe, picking at another tree a few yards away. "Don't you think it's enough for the day, Joe?" Joe climbed down the ladder, lifting the basket hook from the rung. The basket was only half full of red astracans but Joe had nearly cleared the tree. He carried the basket over to Jerry and together they walked over to the heaping pile of apples on the ground and dumped their baskets.

"They got to be sorted now," Jerry said.

"Can you do it?"

"Sure I can do it but I don't feel like it now. I've a mind to leave 'em till to-morrow morning. The ground will only hurt a few."

"What'll we do now, then? You're the boss, Jerry."

"Let's take it easy. Let's lay down awhile."

"Got your pipe, Jerry?"

"It's in my coat on the tree." He went over to a tree and took his pipe from the coat pocket.

"Hold the light, Joe."

"All right. Got it?"

"Yeah, all right."

"I'm gonto lie in the shade here for a while," Joe said.

"I'm willing. The Missus don't have supper till five and there's an hour yet." Jerry sat down beside Joe, his back against the tree trunk.

"Did Dan Higgins ask you to go over to the hotel to-night, Jerry?"

"He did, and it'll be a hot time, leave it to Dan, eh?"

"Don't you think Dan was kiddin'?" Joe asked.

"No, I don't, Joe. He's done it before and it ain't hard to do. Lots of trollops drop in from the highway."

"He said they'd be back to-night."

"Sure they will, too."

"Dan got any hard stuff, Jerry?"

"He got a quart from Rivers, but Rivers like as not made it himself."

"You bet, and it may be poison. That's it. Prohibition, sure, and I fill my belly with rotgut."

"They're watchin' the bootleggers pretty close," Jerry said. "I heard tell of a man on the Kingston Road who made a still for a man workin' for the Revenue Officers. They pinched him and he paid a big fine."

"Cripes, Jerry, it's awful but you know how people feel about it. It's a dry province. What happened to the man and the still?"

"They fined him. I told ya, but the judge gave the fellow that coaxed him to make it a hell of a bawling out and is goin' to have the fine remitted. It was all in the papers."

"It's no good, Jerry, all no good."

"Me too, but we get our snort, don't we?"

"Yeah and I guess we'll have it to-night."

"Sure."

Joe rolled over on his side, pillowing his head in his arms. "Ho hum, I wouldn't mind a little snooze," he said. He lay on his side for a few moments, saying nothing.

Jerry sat up. "Did you hear about Rose MacIntyre?"

"No, what about Rose, Jerry?"

"Hodgins got talkin' to her and one thing and another."

"I guess the old woman sicked him on her."

"I guess so, but anyway she's gonto go to church and Hodgins is talkin' about baptizin' Rose. He's as proud as hell about gettin' Rose."

"That means Rose's gonto be respectable."

"Yes sir, it looks it."

"I can't say as how I'm altogether glad, Jerry. A man gets used to things. We got used to Rose the way she was."

"My pipe's out, got a match?"

"Nope."

"Dammit, I got to get up and get my coat."

"Why didn't you put a match in your pocket?"

Jerry got up and went over to his coat.

"Say, Jerry."

"What?"

"Bring me a pipe full eh?"

"You could of got up instead of me." Jerry brought his pouch over to Joe, who sat up, knocking his pipe against his heel. Jerry looked at his pipe and decided to refill it.

"I guess Hodgins is really going to build a church," Joe said.

"I forgot about him. I'm looking for him," Jerry said, sitting down. He talked about a trial in the States, in Dayton, Tenn., where Clarence Darrow, a famous agnostic lawyer, and W. J. Bryan, an eloquent Christian politician, had clashed because a high school teacher had taught the theory of evolution. Jerry did not like Bryan.

When there remained nothing interesting to talk about they got up and walked slowly out of the orchard. "We want to get at the apples early tomorrow," Joe said.

They parted near the hotel. "See you to-night," Jerry said.

Joe, in good spirits but rather hungry, walked along the road. Lottie would have something nice to eat, she always had something nice. Ever since they got married Lottie had been giving him good meals. So long as she would go on giving him good meals he would be satisfied. Turning along the path to the house he stopped, looking at the haw tree. "The haws are getting ripe," he thought, and picking one, nibbled at it. He went along the picket walk to the back door and into the kitchen. Lottie was moving around the table, pouring milk on three saucers of raspberries for Joe, for Ellen, and herself at the foot of the table. Always they sat at the same places at the table in the kitchen, though on Sundays and special occasions they moved into the dining-room.

"You're just in time, Joe," she said.

"All right, I'm ready, Lottie. I just got to wash."

Lottie called Ellen, who was up-stairs. Ellen did not answer or come down, so she went up to get her. Joe followed Lottie's footsteps up-stairs and into Ellen's room where they could no longer be heard. He took off his coat, put it on the back of the chair, and sat down at the table, waiting. Lottie came down alone.

"Ellen's not feeling well, she says she'll be down afterward," she said, sitting down.

She put some cooked ham on Joe's plate. Joe wondered what was the matter with Ellen, and wished she had come down and now didn't feel much like eating.

He had intended to talk gaily to Lottie at the supper table, but now he had little to say. Lottie talked casually, merely making conversation, and Ellen did not come down at all.

After supper Joe walked around the back yard, waiting

for the paper boy to come. He was not exactly worrying about Ellen not feeling well, since Lottie was not worrying about her. He saw the paper boy's bicycle on the road and met him at the front of the house.

With the paper to read, he felt comfortable. He went into the kitchen, got his glasses, put the paper under his arm, and went out to the front veranda, intending to read until nearly dark, then go over to the hotel. Dan had said they would have a good fast time at the hotel. Dan really didn't know much about it, was just talking, but had promised to have a string of lively women in for the evening, who knew how to give a man a good time. Dan took chances and would get arrested if he didn't watch out. Hen Milburn, the constable, in a friendly way had told him if they got noisy drinking in the hotel, neighbors would force him to take action. He was a decent sort, but Dan was a gentleman in his own way.

Joe went on reading the paper but the police court column was the only one with life in it. The sporting page was just fair with a good comic at the foot of the page. That comic was always good, one of the best things in the paper.

He took off his glasses, folded the paper neatly under his arm, and went in the house. Lottie was out in the back yard but would be going to service in a little while. He would go over to the hotel. It was early but Jerry would likely be over there and they could sit on the veranda and talk. Going along the hall Joe thought he heard some one up-stairs crying. Ellen was crying. Lottie was out in the back yard so it was Ellen all right. He took a few steps up-stairs, his heart pounding unevenly, hesitating to go up to the room and talk to her. He thought of calling Lottie but was afraid she would go up and talk too much to Ellen.

Joe went out quickly, taking his hat from the hall rack but did not care where he went. He was sure he was going to be unhappy, though he assured himself he had

possibly been mistaken and had not heard Ellen crying. But she hadn't come down for supper. She had told Lottie she was sick and now he heard her crying.

6

Joe went over to the hotel but Dan was not there. He knocked on the bar and asked the housekeeper, but she did not know where Dan had gone, so he sat alone on the veranda until nearly dark. Jerry Hammond came along the road whistling. Joe, with his legs stretched out, his thumbs hooked in his belt, had not minded waiting because he could look straight up the short road to the highway. Jerry slapped him on the back and sat down beside him. "Feelin' good, eh, Joe?"

"Just so-so, Jerry. Dan ain't around."

"Maybe he'll come back with his lady friends."

Jerry took out his pipe, a knife and a plug of tobacco. Sticking the pipe in his mouth, he cut away at the plug, then rolled the makings in his hands. He looked at Joe, filled his pipe, lit it and smoked in silence. They could see people down the road going to prayer meeting in the barn. Jerry understood Joe did not feel like talking. A cowbell jingled unevenly down by the river. From the veranda they could see the river and the cement bridge. A boy was driving a cow down the river and up to the road. The cow would not willingly take the short climb to the road at the bridge and the boy slapped it, cutting at it with a gad. The cow switched its tail and climbed clumsily.

"It's funny Dan never got married," Joe said thoughtfully.

"It's funny, but he don't think he missed much."

Joe was silent again and Jerry smoked his pipe. For about half an hour they sat there hardly talking, till Joe could no longer see smoke but only the hot bowl of Jerry's pipe. On the road in front of the hotel a man with a

leather bag at his hip got out of a buggy and lit the lamp, which burned with a pale light. Joe absently watched winged insects gathering around the light, a ring of them streaming tirelessly around the light. When it gets darker, the ring will get thicker, he thought.

"That looks like Dan now," Jerry said.

A small car was coming slowly down the short road from the highway to the hotel. When the car came closer they could make out Dan and a woman beside him on the front seat. "I'll go down," Jerry said.

Joe watched Jerry go over to the car and raise his hat to Dan, who spoke quietly to him and introduced him to the woman at his side. Jerry got on the running-board and helped two women out of the back seat. They all walked up to the veranda.

"Having a nice sleep, Joe?" Dan said.

"No, oh no."

The ladies, dressed poorly but brightly, were introduced. Miss Switzer, a dark girl with a lean face and thin lips, Miss Gorman, in a shoddy suit, the short skirt showing her bowlegs, and Miss Shipman, fair, fat and a little sloppy, all over thirty and free and easy. The women giggled at each other and looked expectantly at the men. Dan insisted they all go in the house and sit down. Dan was feeling good and was very friendly with Miss Switzer who would not let go of his arm when he moved. They went in the house and Joe found himself with the loose-lipped Miss Shipman. Dan had put some chairs in the spare pantry and they all sat down, plump Miss Shipman on the arm of Joe's chair. Dan left the room to look for something to drink.

"You ain't feeling exactly sociable," she said.

"No, I'm not," Joe said rudely.

"Well, you might as well get sociable," she said, patting him on the head, but he kept on looking out the small window down the road to the lighted windows of the big barn.

Dan returned with an unlabelled bottle and four glasses that he placed on the white oilcloth table. He poured a little into each glass. "It's not much but it will help the night along," he said apologetically. Jerry gulped his down, looking mournfully at his Miss Gorman whom he did not like very much. He was ready to drink rapidly.

"This stuff makes me cough," said Miss Shipman, who had forgotten Joe and was sitting on the table, her fat legs dangling loosely. Dan had come to an understanding with the dark thin woman, and sitting on two chairs pulled into the corner, they talked quietly. Joe watched Miss Shipman curiously as if just noticing her. "What's the matter, you old hick? Take a good look," she said.

"Come on, Joe," Jerry said.

"Get comfortable, Joe," said Dan.

"For God's sake shut up," Joe said.

Miss Shipman walked across the floor, her hands on her hips and stood in front of Dan. "Where do I come in? That's what I want to know. Where do I come in? You brought me here," she said threateningly.

"Sit down, Eva," the dark girl pleaded.

"That's all right for you, Lil," said Miss Shipman.

She turned again to Joe and in a wheedling voice said: "What's a matter, honey, won't you let me slide on your knee?" But Joe, his elbows on the windowsill, paid no attention.

The singing in the barn was getting louder and Joe frowned and turned uneasily from the window.

"Yes we will gather at the river.

The beautiful, the beautiful river."

He heard Dan talking with dignity to him. "It ain't fair, that's all I got to say," Dan said.

"No, it ain't. But that singin's kind of loud, ain't it, Dan?"

Dan listened carefully, smiling broadly. "That's right,

they're singing, but when they're singing it keeps them out of trouble."

Miss Shipman put her arms around Joe's neck. Without smiling, Joe put an arm around her neck, but didn't like the stale smell of cheap powder on her skin. She was smoking, blowing the smoke in his face provokingly, so he half-heartedly pinched her and she giggled sloppily, reaching for her glass to give him a drink. Miss Shipman, jealous of the success of her friends, was eager to excite Joe, and was trying not to get drunk too quickly. She had on a blue blouse that fell away from her fat shoulder. She had a nice neck, Joe thought. He patted her neck and shoulder and then lost interest in her suddenly and listened carefully, strangely aloof in melancholy dejection.

"Gather with the Saints at the River."

"The damn fools," he said.

"Who?" said Miss Shipman, leering grimly at him. "Not me and the girl friends."

"No," Joe explained, "the bunch down the road singing."

She cocked her head to one side, listening.

"Oh, the happy Sals. Sure, the damn fools," she said affably, feeling encouraged.

Joe got up and walked over to the table to fill his glass with bootleg. He looked blearily at Dan huddled in the corner with Miss Switzer, who would not get drunk. Dan's eyes were moist. Laughing and babbling, he hung on tight to Miss Switzer. Jerry Hammond was arguing with Miss Gorman, who was sitting sullenly on his knee. Jerry put his arm on her shoulder but she brushed it away, swearing horribly at him. He regarded her doubtfully, trying to make up his mind, then whispered to her and she smiled, putting her head on his shoulder, and Jerry smiled and they were both satisfied.

Joe, standing at the table, emptied his glass and filled it again. Miss Shipman, alarmed, got up and grabbed his

arm. "Not just now, honey, later on, you and me," she said. Joe pushed her away and she sat down heavily in the chair. Joe leaned back against the table, his arms folded across his chest, in an ugly mood.

Jerry started to sing, his voice quavering. Joe turned on him viciously and told him to shut up. Jerry, surprised and very much offended, disdained to answer him.

Miss Shipman had tried to be sociable but now she was offended. "I'm not wasting any more time with that hick. I'm quitting. He gives me the willies," she said.

Joe spoke apologetically to Dan. He was feeling better. He could no longer hear the singing and the bootleg had warmed him up inside. "I guess I got a headache," he said to Dan. "But it's feelin' better now." And he reached out to put his arm around Miss Shipman who, mollified now it was assured she would not be neglected, sat plumply on his knee and showed talent as an entertainer. She told one joke after another, though only Joe was listening.

Then they all heard some one moving outside; some one had come in the hotel wanting attention. Dan muttered to himself and stood up.

"You go, Jerry," he said.

"Naw, get out."

"You go, Joe."

"I don't want to go," Joe said.

Dan left the room uneasily. They heard him moving around outside, and after a few minutes he came in grinning. "Just a man in his car wanting a cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee," he explained. "I was afraid it was Hen Milburn, peddlin' around lookin' for trouble." Dan was quite steady on his feet but still wanted entertainment from Miss Switzer. He sat down on the chair with her but was uncomfortable and decided to sit on the floor and he pulled her down with him.

Joe still brooded unhappily. Miss Shipman, disgusted, shook him by the shoulder. "This is a hell of a party," she said, but he was not listening. She got up and took another

drink. "And this bottle's nearly emptied," she complained bitterly.

Down the road in the barn they were singing again, starting a verse slowly but swelling into a loud burst, dying away into a droning muttering of voices.

A long silence was followed by more singing. Joe wondered what Hodgins was saying and what Lottie and Ellen were doing in the barn. He thought Lottie would be there all right, but was not sure about Ellen.

Miss Shipman guffawed loudly, bending down with her hands on her belly. He tried to take an interest in Miss Shipman but the liquor was going to his head, so he concentrated and found his stomach was lifting up, Miss Shipman was turning turtle and he was hanging on almost upside down until the room rocked back into position again.

Miss Shipman wanted to know if Joe would go up-stairs. She was eager to be the first one of the women to go up-stairs. "I got started later than Lil and Dot but I'm finishing stronger," she explained, sucking her loose lips, trying to appear enthusiastic.

Dan, laughing happily, pulled Miss Switzer, who playfully resisted, out of the room and up-stairs. Jerry and Miss Gorman walked out of the room with more dignity.

"I guess we stay here," Miss Shipman said sullenly.

"I guess so."

"You ain't got the guts of a fish," she said.

"Aw, shut up," Joe said, turning away from her, dropping his head over the back of the chair.

One more burst of singing came from the barn and died away and Joe dimly realized the service was over.

"What time is it?" he said.

"It's only ten o'clock."

"I got to straighten up. I got a home to go to."

Miss Shipman, flustered, decided to be sympathetic. "Do the happy Sals make you creepy?" she said.

"I don't like the singing," he said shortly.

"I don't either," she confided, slapping his head. "I never did like them, eh, Baldy," she said, pressing her breast against his shoulder.

"Why don't you like them?" Joe said indifferently.

"They get on my nerves. I don't like them, never did. They looked after me once for a week and I didn't want to be saved. What you got against them?"

"They get on my nerves."

"Well, they get on plenty."

"Yeah."

Miss Shipman, feeling more comfortable, slipped down frankly on Joe's knee.

"What's the use of looking glum?"

"I think I'll go home."

"Be a sport, for gawd's sake be a sport. If you leave me flat, think of the laugh they'll have on me."

"I don't care."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't."

Sleepily indifferent because of the liquor, he no longer wanted to get rid of her and let his arm rest snugly on her hip, bending his head against her heavy breast. He wanted to sleep. He didn't want to think or talk, only sleep and forget Lottie and Ellen and the hymns. Miss Shipman was all right because she didn't bother him and if she would only keep quiet he would be glad to have her there close to him. He closed his eyes and tried to keep every thought out of his head so his mind would be a blank, but Miss Shipman was getting restless, shifting her weight from his knee, removing her elbow from the arm of the chair. She grunted uneasily and put one foot on the floor.

"I might as well be sitting on a fence," she said.

Joe didn't answer. She jumped up and slapped him on the head till he woke up. "Try to go to sleep on me, will ya," she said. "You dirty rotter, getting a girl on your knee and trying to go to sleep."

He blinked his eyes and looked thoughtfully at Miss Shipman. "What time is it?" he said.

"I don't give a damn what time it is."

"It don't matter, I'd like to go to sleep."

"You got to gimme something, then."

Joe sat up straight suddenly. "What time is it?" he said. He looked out the window and down the road. No lights in the barn windows. No lights on the road, only the bluish white corner light near the hotel. He wanted to go home and was sure he was quite sober enough to talk to Ellen and Lottie. It was time to look clearly at the matter.

"Where's Dan and Jerry?" he said.

"Search me," said Miss Shipman, who was sitting on the table, looking scornfully at him.

Joe stood up and went to go out, but he heard some one coming down-stairs. Dan and the dark woman came into the room. Dan had his arm around her waist and they both seemed to be happy and satisfied.

"I'm going home," Joe said.

"Dang it all, Joe, be a sport," Dan said.

"I got to get home, that's all there is to it."

"What about the girls?"

"I dunno. You look after them."

"Sit down for a minute, Joe, and the girls'll go."

Dan was satisfied and did not care very much. Joe sat down and waited and brooded.

7

Ellen lay on the bed, one leg dragging on the floor. The crumpled pillow was pushed back to the middle of the bed. She had been crying but now could only listen to the beating of her heart. Her head was aching, but, listening carefully, she forgot about her head for the moment, though it throbbed when she could not hear her heart beating.

For three days Ellen had not been feeling well, conscious of something taking place inside her. Knowing what it was made her nervously restless but thinking about it made her head ache.

After supper she had gone up-stairs to her room to lie down and decide what to do. It would be a long time before Aunt Lottie found out anything was wrong with her. No one would know for months, she was sure. Then she thought of Aunt Lottie and Uncle Joe, and hating herself, did not care about living. Now, it was necessary she tell Aunt Lottie. At first she had thought of going away to the city but now it had become a duty to tell and she was scared, and feeling small and unimportant, wanted to find out from Aunt Lottie what to do about it. She repeated over and over to herself lying there on the bed, "I got to go 'way, I got to go 'way," but knew she would first go down-stairs, looking for Aunt Lottie.

Sitting up on the bed, too tired from crying, she looked at her shoes kicked off on the floor, and reached down, picked up one and, putting it on her foot, discovered a loose thread in her silk stocking just above the heel. "If I pull it, it'll all unravel," she thought mechanically, and put on the shoe without pulling the thread.

She sat on the edge of the bed thinking vaguely of talking about unimportant matters to Doris Kremer, and began to hate Uncle Joe. She lay down again, crushing the pillow fiercely and said: "Damn him, damn him, damn him, damn him," until she didn't care about anything.

Ellen tried but could not reach the other shoe from the bed and had to get up finally and get it. She was going downstairs to look for Aunt Lottie and maybe Uncle Joe. If she saw Uncle Joe she'd show him how much she hated him. But she thought he had gone out. Going out of the room she felt scared suddenly of seeing Lottie, but, depressed anyway, didn't much care what was said to her. At the head of the stairs she felt better and went back to the room to tidy her hair and straighten her dress. Looking

in the glass she remembered she was supposed to go to service to-night and it suddenly became important that she should tell Aunt Lottie before going over to the barn. She didn't want to go in the barn again. That was all over, all gone. She had tried to think about praying but her thoughts had got twisted with things far away. She was no good, that was the trouble.

On the way down-stairs, she heard Aunt Lottie at the front of the house talking to some one. Ellen didn't go through to the kitchen, but waited in the hall until Aunt Lottie could come in. Ellen knew Lottie was talking to Lou Henry, who was passing down the road, friendly because Lou was going away. Lou sounded glad to be friendly and Lottie was politely interested. There was a long pause. Ellen listening in the hall knew neither one had much to say and Lottie would come around to the back door. Lou said good evening and Lottie came along the picket walk and into the kitchen, walking over to the mirror. Ellen could not see her but knew just where she was walking in the kitchen.

"Ellen, Ellen, you'll be late, if you're coming," Lottie called. Ellen walked into the kitchen.

"Hurry, Ellen," Lottie said impatiently. "You're not nearly ready."

Ellen walked across the kitchen to a chair at the end of the table.

"I don't think I'll be going," she said bluntly and sat down.

Lottie stopped putting on her hat before the mirror and said quickly, "Why don't you want to go, Ellen?"

"I just don't want to."

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"I guess I'm all right."

"Don't be so silly, if you're not all right say so and no one will expect you to go."

"I don't know, I just don't know," Ellen said absently.

"Then you'd better go," Lottie said with peevish disappointment, turning huffily to the mirror. Ellen did not move. Lottie looked at her again and saw she was pale and worried. Lottie, adjusting her hat, went over to the table to put her arm sympathetically around Ellen's shoulder; she oughtn't to be cross to a sick girl, she said. Ellen pushed the arm from her shoulder and looked at Aunt Lottie stupidly. Lottie was indignant.

"You don't need to be bold," she said crossly.

"I'm not bold, Aunt Lottie."

"Well, I call that bold, but suit yourself. I'm going to church," and she went out of the kitchen.

Ellen said quickly: "Please don't go to church, Aunt Lottie."

"What's got into you?" Lottie said, standing in the hall. She took her coat from the hall rack. "Of course I'm going to church and I'm surprised you don't seem anxious. If you're not feeling good, it's not wrong to miss."

Ellen kept on looking uneasily at Aunt Lottie and would have spoken but her lips were trembling. Aunt Lottie opened the front door. She heard Ellen crying and hurried back along the hall.

"What's the matter, Ellen," she said, looking hard at her.

"I dunno, things are wrong," Ellen muttered almost to herself.

Lottie pulled a chair back from the table and sat down slowly, looking earnestly at Ellen. She wanted to be motherly but did not know how to approach Ellen, who looked up wearily.

"There's no use crying," Ellen said.

"Sometimes it helps," Lottie said.

"It don't help me."

"Well, it may."

"Well, it can't."

Lottie took off her hat and put it on the table. "I won't

go to church," she said deliberately. "I'll stay home with you."

"I want to tell you, but I don't know how to tell you," said Ellen, a puzzled expression on her face.

Lottie looked at her suspiciously and said sharply: "What have you been doing? Tell me now, do you hear, or I'll find out."

She took hold of Ellen's wrist, jerking her sharply forward and Ellen straightened up. Ellen was scared and wanted to go up-stairs but Aunt Lottie held on tightly to her wrist, her lips hesitating to voice the thought that was making her sit stiffly in the chair. Looking directly into Lottie's eyes, Ellen wavered once and thought of lying, but then her whole body felt limp; she didn't care, and, looking away from Aunt Lottie, she told in a hesitating, stumbling fashion of the night down by the river. Lottie, listening with contemptuous bitterness, pressed her lips into a firm line and when she had finished said in a hard, precise voice: "Now who was it?"

Ellen looked at her vaguely and said, "Uncle Joe."

Lottie's body was rigid, she was motionless and mute, then her hand slowly caressed her throat.

"Uncle Joe," she repeated mechanically.

"Yes."

"Joe?"

"Yes, Uncle Joe. Oh, Aunt Lottie, you're hurting my wrist!"

Lottie, dropping her hand suddenly to the table, whined, "Lord, Lord, Lord, oh my Lord," but she held hard to Ellen's wrist, her other hand flailing the table helplessly. Ellen was crying and watching Lottie.

It was getting dark. A light in Henry's place could be seen through the kitchen window. Ellen could not see into the corner of the kitchen but they sat there at the table. Ellen no longer cared how hard Aunt Lottie squeezed her wrist. Lottie's moaning frightened her and it was getting dark. No use moving. No use trying to do anything but

sit there and watch the shifting line of Lottie's back. Ellen wished it would not get dark so quickly.

Lottie's head shot up suddenly and she screamed, "You reptile," and pounded Ellen's knuckles on the table, muttering over and over drearily, "My Joe, my Joe." And then she was still. Ellen slumped in her chair and cried quietly.

Ellen couldn't see Aunt Lottie very well in the dark but knew she was sitting up straight.

"It's no use," Lottie said softly.

They could hear the singing in the barn across the road. Lottie started to cry again and Ellen knew she was thinking of Hodgins and the baptism in the lake, but all that no longer mattered to Ellen. She was sorry for Aunt Lottie but nothing was important now.

"What will people say?" Lottie whispered.

"Oh, I don't know why it had to happen. It just happened. I don't know why. It just happened, that's all, Aunt Lottie."

"I guess we should light the light," Lottie said absently.

"I don't want the light lit."

They sat close to each other in the dark and Ellen heard Lottie's heavy breathing.

"We've got to do something," Lottie said harshly.

"I know something's got to be done."

"I won't live here," Lottie said quietly.

"I don't want to live here, I don't want to live at all."

"You do want to live. That's why you did it. You're no good," Lottie said bitterly.

"I'll go away. I'm going into the city," Ellen said eagerly.

"You little fool, what are you going to do in the city?"

"I don't know," Ellen said. She was becoming afraid of Aunt Lottie, who stood up and seemed to tower over her. Ellen could hardly see her take the few steps toward the door. "Where you going, Aunt Lottie?" Ellen said, frightened.

"I don't know, I don't care," she said wearily.

"I'll do anything you say, Aunt Lottie."

Ellen knew Lottie was turning around at the door, a black object in the shadow. Lottie came back slowly, her legs striking against the chair, and sat down again. She was getting excited. She sat down but stood up nervously. Ellen began to fidget in the dark.

"Light the light, Aunt Lottie."

"I don't ever want to see Joe again," Lottie said lifelessly.

"I hate Uncle Joe now, but it's no use."

"We'll be driven out of the village. We'll be driven out of the village, but not me, I'll see to that," she said excitedly.

"Oh, I wish I was dead, Aunt Lottie."

Lottie gripped the edge of the table, shaking it. "I wish you were dead. I wish you weren't born. We might as well all be dead."

"Aunt Lottie, I'd die if I could. You know that, Aunt Lottie."

"Let's not stay here, Ellen. Let's go out of here."

Ellen was glad to be able to do something, would have done anything Lottie suggested. She got up and put her hand on Lottie's arm and said: "I don't care where we go but I don't want to stay here."

"I wonder if I'd better light the light," Lottie muttered. She was accustomed to lighting the light before this time.

"Not now, Aunt Lottie. I don't want to look around."

"I'm going to light the light," Lottie said deliberately.

She went over to the shelf near the pantry and Ellen heard a fumbling in the match-box, the match was scratched and the yellow light flared close to Lottie's face. The light flickered and went out, but Lottie had taken the globe off the lamp and another match lit the wick. She put on the globe and carried the lamp over to the table.

"It isn't your fault, Ellen," she said simply.

"Oh, it's all the same," Ellen said.

"There's not much use living, everything's gone now."

"I want to get out. I want to do anything, I don't mind dying," Ellen said eagerly.

Lottie stood by the table, miserably grim. "We'll go out together and we'll not come back," she said.

"Let's go now. Come on now," Ellen said.

Lottie stood by the table, her head swaying slightly, her eyes closed. "I'm going to leave a note for Joe," she said finally.

Ellen watched her fumble with the knob of the table-drawer and pull it out, looking for a pencil. Then Lottie walked deliberately across the kitchen to get a piece of paper from the newspaper rack under the mirror. She sat down at the table and wrote a few lines. "I'm leaving this note," she explained, and read it very practically: "Dear Joe, we won't be back. There is no use looking for us." She put the pencil back in the drawer and leaned the paper against the lamp-handle.

Ellen thought Aunt Lottie seemed to have become almost a stranger to her, too deliberate, too firm of purpose.

"Come on, Ellen, we don't want to stay here."

"I'll go wherever you say. I don't want to come back. I'll get my hat."

Ellen went down the hall to the rack, but Lottie said, "We don't need any hats."

"I guess we don't," Ellen said.

8

Lottie and Ellen walked down the path under the haw tree to the road. The road was dark in the shadows from the houses and hills, but a moon was shining clearly in the sky. A good land breeze was blowing to the lake.

"It's almost like daylight out," Ellen said.

"Don't talk. Please don't talk, Ellen."

Ellen looked sideways at Aunt Lottie, who was staring straight down the road. Down the road was the barn and lights were in the windows. Ellen hoped they would not

hear singing because she knew instinctively Lottie was thinking of the barn.

They passed by the big, old, dilapidated barn with the yellow light in the small window and Lottie did not look at it. There was no sound of singing. "They must be praying," Ellen thought. Lottie was walking with her coat flowing open, the breeze curving it in a wide arc behind her, the short strands of hair usually hanging over her forehead tossed back by the breeze. Ellen, taking shorter steps than Lottie, stared straight ahead.

"Which way'll we go, Aunt Lottie?"

"What'd you say?"

"Where'll we go?"

"We'll just keep on."

"All right, I don't care."

"We don't want to live, we don't care, we'll go down by the river."

"I want to, Aunt Lottie, but I'm scared."

"Walk beside me, Ellen."

They came to the small cement bridge over the river and Lottie stopped, leaning over the rail, looking down the river to the massive high-level bridge and its huge shadow over the valley.

"We'll go down there," she said.

Lottie looked hard at Ellen and her eyes burned brightly, but her lips remained in the firm line of her mouth.

She walked over to the corner of the bridge to go down the path to the river, walking straight down without leaning back, her weight carrying her forward much quicker than she had expected, her open coat ballooning behind her like a sail in the wind. At the bottom of the short path she stood buttoning her coat. "I should have buttoned this coat before," she said vaguely. Ellen came down the path and stood beside her. Linking arms they walked down the path by the river. Lottie never looked back. Ellen turned once, looking over at the hotel and the lights in the window.

Ellen, looking behind, knew Uncle Joe was in the hotel.

Lottie and she walking down by the river and Joe over there drinking, and maybe having a good time, and no longer feeling lifeless, she began to walk slowly, wanting to go back to the hotel after Uncle Joe. She felt suddenly like killing her uncle and wondered why Lottie didn't want to do anything to him. Walking slowly, she stopped. They were on the path, a few feet from the river, wide and shallow at this spot. The breeze had become stronger. It was getting windy.

"What's the matter?" Lottie said quickly.

"I'd like to go back."

Lottie, hesitating, sat down on the ground and put her head on her knees. One of her knees sank down, the leg stretched out and her foot slipped into the water. Ellen stood beside her, hardly looking at her. "Your foot's in the water," she said.

"I don't care."

Lottie was beginning to feel so lonely it hurt her inside. She felt she could not lift up her knee, and her head was heavy. Everything worth while seemed to have gone out of her, her whole body felt too heavy, and she could hardly look at Ellen. The water seeped through the shoe leather and her toes got wet.

"Get up, Aunt Lottie."

"Why do you want to go back, Ellen? There's no use going back."

Ellen felt suddenly bewildered and could not make up her mind about anything. "I want to go back and do something," she said. "I didn't want to stay back. I want to go with you. Please get up, Aunt Lottie, please, please." Ellen was trembling, the wind chilled her.

Lottie got up slowly, heavily, and took Ellen's arm. They stood hesitating, holding on to each other, the wind blowing Ellen's thin dress against her legs. The wind was blowing through Lottie's hair that straggled down her back, ends sticking out awkwardly. She did not have much hair.

Going down the river, they walked slowly without talk-

ing. The river became wider and the current slower. They were walking in the big shadow of the bridge. The water in Lottie's shoe swished as she walked and the persistent noise irritated Ellen. She could think of nothing else but the water in Lottie's shoe, and the squeaking noise drifted with lazy, dull monotony through her thoughts. And then she could not hear the squeaking and hardly knew she was walking, though Lottie was beside her, holding her arm.

The path forked out about fifty paces from the bridge, one path climbing up the hill to the bridge, the other narrowing, going on under the steel girders arched like a giant web over the river. Lottie looked up at the lights on the bridge. "I'd like to be 'way up there," she said. A light was near the rail in the middle of the bridge.

"We'll go under the bridge," Lottie said.

"All right."

They walked under the bridge, on the path close to the river. The river was wide and deep under the bridge, the path was very close to the heavy cement foundations, the bed for the steel girders.

Lottie hesitated and turned back to climb the hill until even with the top of the cement foundations. Ellen followed her, anxious to do whatever Lottie did. To get on the cement foundations from the slope of the hill Lottie had to jump and Ellen did not think she could make it. Lottie had always been too nervous a woman to do such a thing, but now she gathered her skirts above her thin knees and jumped, sprawling on the foundation. Ellen, playing in the valley, had often jumped to the foundation and made it easily, and knelt down beside Lottie, who was not hurt, simply staring down at the dark water.

"The water's deep here," Lottie said.

"Yes, it's pretty deep here, Aunt Lottie."

Ellen's imagination became very lively looking down at the water. She became uncomfortable and aware that her hands were cold and clammy. Lottie's lips were moving but

Ellen could not hear what she was saying. It was very dark under the bridge and the cement foundation was cold.

Lottie was kneeling, still looking down, listening carefully to the water, running smoothly and quietly till it seemed a black liquid running through her mind. She straightened up, looking hard at Ellen, and clutched her hand tightly.

"We got to do it, Ellen."

Looking down at the dark water under the bridge drove all the thoughts from Ellen's head, but when Aunt Lottie stood up, jerking her up too, she no longer wanted to think of the water. She was afraid.

"We got to, Ellen," Lottie was muttering. "You know we got to, we really got to." Her nails were digging into Ellen's wrist. She stood up straight on the cement foundation, looking down at the water until her head tilted down slowly. Ellen stood beside her, trembling, trying to close her eyes and forget about the water. Then she instinctively drew back from the edge and Lottie looked at her fiercely and jerked her forward. Ellen was too scared to say anything, but Lottie, holding on grimly, fell forward and downward, pulling Ellen with her. Ellen did not cry out. The deep water was not cold. The two heads bobbed up over the smooth surface. One of Lottie's arms hooked around Ellen's neck, the head bent back, the chin sticking up out of the water dipped down again. Lottie's mouth yawned wide in her pale wet face, the jaw stiff, and they sank down in the deep water. They did not come up again.

9

The three women got into Dan's car for the drive into the city. Miss Shipman didn't bother saying good night to Joe and didn't answer when he spoke to her. At the last moment Jerry decided to go with Dan and the women,

and take the consequences from his wife when he got home. Joe cranked the car and waved his arm in a friendly fashion but no one paid any attention to him. He was left standing alone in front of the hotel. The wind was blowing strongly against Dan's canvas beer and ale sign.

Sitting in the hotel Joe had wanted to hurry home but now with his hands in his pockets he walked slowly, the wind cooling his head. He had been thinking too much about Lottie and Ellen and, feeling tired, his thoughts now drifted away from them, walking along, looking down at the ground. An automobile headlight appeared on the hill and, before turning across the high-level bridge, shone on the telegraph wires along the road in the valley. Joe could look up and count the wires glistening in the light. The big, deserted barn loomed up in the shadows like a big hulk. Joe stood still for a moment, trying to come to some conclusion about it, but could not concentrate, so he moved on. He was quite sober. Walking along the road he assured himself he was sober but wondered why he could see a light in the house. Surely Lottie had gone to bed at eleven o'clock. After a service she was tired usually and went to bed early. Ellen might be sitting up reading. Joe was glad she liked reading so much. . . . Quite a wind was blowing, humming through the telegraph wires. In the fall the wind would blow strongly with a droning noise through the wires, he thought.

Going along the walk to the house he looked up at the sky. It looked as if it might rain, though there had been no clouds earlier in the evening. He opened the front door and went along the hall to the kitchen, expecting to see Lottie or Ellen sitting at the table reading. No one was there. "They forgot to turn out the light," he thought, going over to the table where he saw the note leaning against the handle of the lamp.

He read the note and read it again and looked vaguely at the light. The lamp must have been smoking, there's a dark ring at the top of the globe, he thought, but his

heart began to beat loudly. Joe walked slowly across the kitchen to the wood-shed and opened the door, closing it immediately, wondering why he had done it. "Lottie," he called. "Lottie." He started along the hall but turned and went into the kitchen, took the light from the table, and hurried up-stairs, the lamp tilting, the dark ring at the top of the globe deepening.

Lottie was not in the bedroom. Ellen was not in her room. He put the lamp on the dresser in Ellen's room and sat down on the bed, rubbing his head slowly with his hand and looking stupidly at the pattern on the rug. Lottie had wanted the rug on the floor beside the bed so Ellen's bare feet would not be on the cold floor, getting up in the morning. The lamp was still smoking. He jumped up suddenly, blew it out, and ran down-stairs out the front door. He stood in the centre of the deserted road but didn't know which way to turn.

He knew Ellen had told Lottie what had happened down by the lake. He was bewildered, afraid of what Lottie might do, and looked helplessly down the road, wishing his heart would stop thumping. He wiped his mouth with his hand and felt sure he would be able to act effectively if his heart would stop thumping. He started to run along the road and up the hill to the radial terminal, running so fast he could not get his breath opposite the Anglican church on the hill. After walking a few paces he ran again, all the way to the radial terminal. There would be no car for fifteen minutes. If Lottie had gone to the city she would have caught a car earlier in the evening.

Joe went in the lighted terminal waiting-room and sat down to try and think clearly, but his glance shifted from one wall to another, unconsciously reading the jokes written in chalk on the walls. He would have to act quickly. Lottie could not be far away and if he could only keep cool he could find her. He could think only of Lottie, but he wanted to find Ellen, too.

Getting up slowly, he stood at the door, looking along

the tracks. His knees were weak and he wanted to sit down, but he walked back along the road as far as Kremer's place. It was late but he pounded at the door. Three times he pounded before he heard some one coming down-stairs.

Ike opened the door and saw Joe on the veranda. "What's up, for Chrisake, Joe," he said.

"You didn't see the Missus and Ellen?" Joe said, deliberately casual.

Ike came out on the veranda, an overcoat was over his nightgown and his hair was standing up at the back of his head. He leaned over close to Joe. "You been drinking, Joe," he said.

"Yeah, I been drinking, Ike, but the Missus ain't home and Ellen ain't home."

Joe did not show Ike the note in his hand. He would not show anybody the note. It would do no good. It would not help anybody to find Lottie.

"Where could she get to?" Ike said, still sleepy, but getting interested.

"I don't know, Ike. Her hat's on the table."

"That's funny."

"I got to do something, Ike. I got to look for them."

Ike said, "Just a minute," and went up-stairs. Joe waited so long he felt like going away, but Mrs. Kremer came down and stuck her head out the door, holding a coat-collar high on her throat.

"Where do you think she is, Mr. Harding?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't know at all. I got no idea. Didn't you see her at church?"

"No, she wasn't at church."

"No, that's right, Ellen wasn't feeling well," Joe said.

The three of them stood on the small veranda and no one knew what to say. "I'll go in and get my pants on," Ike said suddenly.

Mrs. Kremer watched Joe shifting uneasily swaying from side to side, too agitated to do much talking.

"It's strange," Mrs. Kremer said.

"It's strange," Joe repeated. "I can't make it out."

Ike came down-stairs tucking his shirt in his pants. "Let's take a look around and if we can't find them, we'll tell Hen Milburn, though he won't do much good," he said.

Ike and Joe walked over home and Joe went up-stairs to get the lamp, but was so long Ike followed him. Joe was trying to light the wick but his fingers were shaking and he could not strike a match properly. Ike lit the lamp. "It's been smoking," he said.

"I did it bringing it up-stairs."

They looked all over the house. Joe looked again in the bedrooms and in the wood-shed, then sat down at the kitchen table. Lottie's coat was gone and there on the table was her black hat with the blue ribbon.

The hat had looked good on Lottie. Many thoughts came into Joe's head and he began to feel sick at his stomach and wished he had not drunk so much beer on top of the whiskey. Ike was talking but Joe could not make out what he was saying, he could not adjust the words in his head.

"I guess there's no use looking around," he said.

Ike sat down at the table. "Why would they go off like that?"

"I haven't any idea, Ike. That's all I can say."

They sat looking at each other until Joe's chin dropped to his chest. Ike took out his knife and began to clean his nails. Joe straightened up suddenly. "I don't think they'd go in the city," he said. "I'm going to look all around. I got an idea they're not far away."

He stood up and buttoned his coat carefully. No longer tired, he could think clearly, consecutively.

"Go down and see Hen Milburn, will you Ike?"

"What'll you do?"

"I'll look around outside."

"There ain't many places to look, Joe."

"They may have gone for a walk. It was warm. They

may have gone for a walk down by the river. It won't do no harm to look," he said stubbornly.

"All right. Come on."

At the road they separated. Joe went along to the river, walking slowly at first, trying to think of nothing and look all around. He found himself walking faster, soon he was running down the path, glad there was a strong wind because it cooled his head.

At times when the moon was bright and it was quite light on the path he could see across the river and along the banks, but when thick clouds hid the moon he had to look straight ahead. The clouds got thicker, then one inky rift became a big blotch and he could see the stars. He did not see the moon again. He slowed down going along the narrow path under the high-level bridge.

He stopped running and walked fast, a lonely, tired feeling inside him. He would not find Lottie but felt better to be looking for her. He was going down to the lake to walk along the beach. He would climb up on the hills and look out over the lake.

On the beach he could see better, but the sound of the lapping water of the lake disturbed him and he wanted to get away from it. The low hills back away from the shore line grew steep. The bluffs were not so far away. He could climb up the face of the steep hills and look out over the lake. He hesitated but felt that he had to be on the hill-top and looking out over the lake.

It was a hard climb. In places the grass was long and he could hang on, pulling himself up, but there were layers of soft sand and a slippery belt of wet clay. Joe's foot slipped on the wet clay and he slid into a narrow gully, his feet moving rapidly, his body wheeling to make his feet strike firmly the opposite bank of the gully. He managed to keep on his feet until his hands caught a stump sticking out over the edge of the narrow defile. Falling had scared him and his heart was fluttering wildly. He tried to get his breath, but his arms seemed to be

getting weaker so he pulled himself up to the ledge and scrambled on up the face of the hill. On top he lay flat on his belly in the thick grass, breathing hard.

He had intended to sit down calmly on the hill, looking out over the lake, but, flat on his belly, he lay there and began to cry. The night noises from the hills worried him and he wanted to get back to the house. His heart bounded eagerly. Lottie might be at home, because she was always there when he went home in the evenings, and would be in bed when he went home to-night. It wouldn't take so long to get home. Instead of going down to the beach and up the valley, he would walk straight across the height of land till he came to the Kingston Road and go east. An hour's walk.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Joe got home. A light was still in the house. He saw the light and started to run. The front door was open. Looking down the hall to the kitchen, he saw Jerry Hammond and Dan Higgins and could hear Ike Kremer and Hen Milburn talking. Lottie had not been found.

"Here's Joe now," Jerry said.

"Sit down, Joe."

"God, man, you're all in."

"I'm all right," Joe said wearily.

Joe sat down weakly in Dan's chair and scrutinized everybody in turn. "I guess it's no use," he said.

Hen Milburn asked Joe where he had been, but before Joe could answer Dan insisted he should go up-stairs and sleep.

"We're all going out to look," Hen explained.

"There's no use looking," Joe said.

He slumped in his chair, listening until voices, getting mixed up with his thoughts, droned in his ear. If Lottie was within miles of the village she would be found sooner or later, he said to himself. Everybody knew about it. Everybody would talk about it. He simply had to sit there and wait. If he could only lean back and wait with

his feet stretched. If only Lottie would call him. Joe was dozing, but Ike Kremer reached over and shook him. "Better go to bed, Joe," he said.

"I don't want to go to bed."

"Go now and get up early."

Joe stood up and it was very good of them all to help him. Dan listened uneasily, because Joe had been over at the hotel. Milburn was saying he had phoned the city and now the four of them would search systematically. Hen Milburn was excited and talked authoritatively. He had taken charge of the search and would see it was done thoroughly.

Joe went up-stairs and lay down on the bed, intending to lie down for just a few minutes, but was soon sound asleep.

10

At half past ten next morning Joe was told Herb MacIntosh, the religious man living down near the beach, had pulled Lottie and Ellen out of the lake near the river mouth. Hen Milburn told Joe about it. Joe lay back in the bed, closed his eyes, and said nothing.

The bodies were carried up to the house by Ike Kremer, Jerry Hammond, Dan Higgins, and Herb MacIntosh. Joe did not go down to the beach, but waited on the veranda and saw the procession, coming up the path by the river, hesitate at the climb near the cement bridge, Jerry backing up slowly, farther behind, Dan backing up slowly. They came down the road and up the path under the haw-tree to the front door. Joe did not move off the veranda.

Hen Milburn, who had stayed with Joe, came down-stairs with two sheets and told the men to carry the bodies into the parlor. Jerry, holding Lottie Harding by the shoulder, tried to back up the steps.

"Will you move, Joe, please?" Jerry said.

"Yes, I'll move, I'll go in the house."

He went into the parlor and sat down, watching Hen Milburn lay the bodies out on the floor. He looked once at Lottie's face, the puffed and darkened lips, the matted hair, and did not want to look at Ellen. Hen drew the sheets over the bodies and straightened up. All the men took off their hats. "That's done," Dan said.

"I guess we'd better get an undertaker," Hen said.

Joe stood up. "Would you mind doing it, Hen?"

"Sure I'll do it, Joe."

Hen went down the road to phone and Herb MacIntosh, Jerry, and Dan looked awkwardly at each other. Joe wanted to say something appropriate. The neighbors had been very kind and now it was time to thank them appropriately but thoughts did not come easily and he did not say the intended words, just, "Thanks very much." They all went out to the kitchen and sat down around the table.

Dan said gravely, "It won't do no harm to smoke, I guess."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't smoke," Joe said mildly.

"It's got to be found out why they did it," Ike said. "No one seems to know. No one may ever know."

"I guess we'll never find out," Joe said.

Sitting in the kitchen they talked the matter over slowly from all angles. Joe was curiously interested in everybody's opinion. He began to talk rapidly, advancing a number of theories, but stopped talking suddenly and was silent, melancholy, and dejected, refusing to answer any question, staring stupidly at the oilcloth on the floor. He felt responsible for all the trouble. It was hard to believe no one thought him the cause of the suicide, but everybody hesitated to use such an unpleasant word. He was getting lots of sympathy, but if he would just stand up there in the kitchen and start talking, they would change their opinions. One or two words would do it. Talking quite casually, he would come to the point quickly before

they were aware of what he was saying and they would look hard at him. Dan maybe would let his chin drop. Joe got excited thinking about it. If he hadn't thrown that note away he could pull it out of his pocket and say, "Here, I'll tell you a thing or two," but it was no good thinking about it. He felt very much like talking but it was no use. Over and over he repeated to himself it was no good to start talking.

The smoke was getting thick in the room. Jerry got up and opened a window, a shaft of sunlight came slanting through the thick smoke in the room. The sunlight shone on Dan's red and shiny bald head. Dan blinked and waved his hand in front of his eyes. it was noon time.

Dan said he would be going, but, if wanted, everybody knew where to find him. Ike asked Joe to have dinner with him and Joe accepted. Everybody felt better to be moving. Herb MacIntosh, the religious man, had hardly opened his mouth, smoking his pipe calmly. Joe, staring at him, remembered he was said to have killed his wife.

Going out the door, Ike said, "Don't worry about the undertaker, Joe. Hen'll look after him. Hen'll be glad to do it. It'll make him feel important. He ain't had anything to do for a long while."

Joe smiled and Jerry laughed loudly, mirthlessly. Joe and Ike walked across the road to Kremer's house to have dinner.

An hour later Joe, looking out Kremer's front window, saw a small crowd gathered around his house. People had come from miles away, morbidly curious to get close to the house and inside if possible, but Hen Milburn stood grimly at the door. The undertaker's black automobile was in front of the house.

After a time Hen came over and explained fussily the bodies had been taken into the city. It was necessary to take them into the city because they had been found in the river. The matter was now out of his hands, though there was still work for him to do exercising his intelli-

gence. That was all there was to it for him, though he would appreciate a quiet talk with Joe.

Ike and Mrs. Kremer left Joe and Hen alone in the parlor and Hen picked his nose and couldn't make head nor tail of the business. "She was a very religious woman," he said.

"She was very religious," Joe said.

"And this here Ellen was all right, too."

That was as far as he could go. Hesitating to suggest Ellen might have been carrying on with fellows, he talked vaguely about it being a different matter if Ellen had been a gadabout. Finally he said, "There's no knowing when a woman gets too religious, but everybody said Mrs. Harding was such a good woman." He added in a matter-of-fact tone, "I never took much stock in the goings-on in the barn."

Joe was not interested. The simple questions as to where he had been last night he answered easily and willingly, and told of coming home, finding the light lit. and running up and down the road. Hen made a few careful notes, then shook hands heartily with Joe.

All day Joe could not straighten the matter out in his head. He knew definitely he did not want to sleep alone in the house. Alone for any length of time, he muttered to himself and got excited.

At night he did not sleep well, imagining himself talking to Lottie about trifling matters, and shuddering when he thought of Ellen. The long imaginary talks with Lottie pleased him. There she was sitting at the table and he was reading the paper to her. And then Joe found himself awake in bed, hating Hodgins. The house was quiet and from the bed he could look out the window down the road to the Harvey Simpsons' place. Hodgins was living there. Joe was glad he was able to think so much about Hodgins and went to sleep.

Many people next morning came to see Joe in the Harding house. The Rev. John Adams called just before

dinner and talked about a proper Christian burial, insinuating Lottie had been unduly excited by the mistaken zeal of a few misguided fanatics who did not correctly understand the principles of religious practice. Joe listened respectfully and then was eager to explain the circumstances, but had not the faintest idea why Lottie and Ellen had done such a thing.

In the afternoon Hodgins called but did not talk much, having lost confidence. He did not try to conceal his feelings and seemed to have more real sympathy for Joe than many people who had known him a long time. Hodgins tried to say a few appropriate words about never knowing when a dear one will be taken away, but mumbled and said miserably, "Oh gee, I'm so sorry I feel like going back to the city and staying there and giving up everything here."

Joe felt he did not hate Hodgins because he seemed a good-natured young fellow, not used to being close to death. At the door he stood for a minute and asked Joe if he objected to him calling again. On the veranda Joe said hastily, "Won't you bury them, Mr. Hodgins? Lottie would want you to bury them."

Hodgins said quietly, "I'll do it, Mr. Harding," and walked quickly down the path to the road, without looking back.

For the rest of the day Joe did not see any one. All afternoon he walked idly up the river between the hills. Not for anything would he have gone downstream or along the beach. Climbing a low hill to sit on a rock his imagination took a lively turn and closing his eyes he could almost see Lottie and Ellen sitting in the kitchen and hear Lottie talking. Sitting on the big round stone his head dropped forward to his hands, elbows on his knees, and he cried. He was feeling old, broken up inside, and did not ever again want to move quickly. He could not feel sure of himself and longed for some one consoling thought.

Slowly he walked downstream, some of the leaves on the trees were turning yellow and he thought of the fall coming on and the days in October that had always been lonesome for him. Ellen would have been starting back to school shortly. He sat on the end of a log jutting out into the river and cried again, muttering, "I'm sick, oh, so sick," and his head started to sweat and he remembered how he had knelt down with Lottie that night in the bedroom, Lottie had prayed and he had thought of Hodgins. He got up quickly and walked rapidly down the river to the hotel.

It was getting dark. He had something to eat with Dan, and afterward they sat in the spare pantry looking solemnly at each other, drinking great quantities of poor beer.

And then Joe said, "I might as well go home."

"How would you like to sleep here?"

"No, I'm going home. I got to get used to it, so I'm going home."

The following night there was an inquest in the city and Joe was forced to attend it. There was some doubt at the inquest as to whether Ellen was pregnant. They concluded she was pregnant because it gave a motive to the suicide. Joe could not tell them very much.

The account of the inquest in the papers satisfied everybody in the village. They were sorry for Joe, but evidently it hadn't done Ellen any good to go off to High School in the city and get in with older boys, and they remembered Ellen had been too lively at her age; her ultimate end seemed to be a vindication of established opinion in the village. They could not understand what had got into Mrs. Lottie Harding, who had been such a respectable woman, though a little silly about religion the last few months.

Lottie and Ellen had a good funeral. Rev. John Adams did not attend, though the burial was in the Harding plot in the little Anglican cemetery on the hill. The Anglican minister, Rev. Peter Hayes, who came into the village only

on Sundays and did not know anybody very well, assisted Hodgins at the funeral service, which was simple. This thin gray man with a warm smile said it did not matter very much where they were buried so long as it was in Christian ground.

A crowd came to the funeral and tried to get into the parlor close to the two coffins. Mrs. Harvey Simpson bustled around, worrying Joe, explaining that a number of people would return to the house after the funeral and he should have something to eat in the house.

"Do you know where Mrs. Harding kept her silver knives and forks?" she said, determined to set a good table.

"No, I don't."

"It won't look right without them."

"This ain't no wedding." Joe said. "I don't care."

He left her in the kitchen and went into the parlor to take a last look at the faces in the coffins. Three young girls were standing solemnly beside the coffins. One of the girls giggled and the other two started to giggle, and blushing, they hurried from the room, the girl who had giggled first starting to cry going along the hall.

Joe felt sorry for the three girls because they could not help giggling. "They're just a little younger than Ellen was," he said to himself. Ellen had not liked funerals.

From the Harding house to the Anglican cemetery was a short walk. The hearse went on before and the procession walked slowly up the hill and Hodgins prayed by the open grave. Joe was one of the first to leave the cemetery.

Mrs. Harvey Simpson was disappointed when Joe explained he did not want people in the house after the funeral. Joe insisted he wanted to be left alone, and, though unwilling, she submitted, but pointed out he hadn't made any arrangements and she hadn't found Lottie's silver forks.

Everybody went home at supper time. Mrs. Kremer asked Joe over for tea, but he had promised to eat at the

hotel with Dan Higgins. Mrs. Kremer's manner suggested it was not quite right to eat with Dan so soon after such a solemn occasion.

11

A few days after the funeral Joe talked of moving away from Eastmount. Sympathy for him had gradually changed to doubtful suspicion of his good intentions. People were talking of wide differences of opinion between Lottie and him. Lottie was a religious woman and he had always tried to discourage her, they said. It might have got on her nerves and caused her to despair of his salvation, though he had been a good enough husband, no one doubted that. His godless opinions must have been revolting to a highly strung woman like Mrs. Harding, so conscious of the spiritual values in life. The Rev. John Adams had said he could have little real sympathy for Joe under the circumstances.

The Kremers, the Hammonds and Dan Higgins were more friendly than ever with Joe. Mrs. Moore, calling to express sympathy, had indignantly advised him not to pay any attention to anything the hottentots in the barn had to say. Mrs. Moore had made up her mind to let everybody know she preferred Joe to his detractors.

Joe did not like people to be talking, whispering behind his back, little kids pointing at him when he walked down the road. He was accustomed to being friendly with everybody.

It was lonely in the house. The kitchen seemed very big. He devoted a lot of time to the hens, cleaned out the henhouse thoroughly. He attended to the potato plants and hoped they would turn out as well as Henry's. Old Mrs. Henry came over one afternoon to talk about the potato plants and was quite friendly. In a rude way she gave him to understand she had never had anything against

him. Joe said he was glad the Henrys had decided to stay in Eastmount until the end of September, old neighbors were worth while to a man.

In the evenings, after getting his own supper, he read the paper and then went over to the hotel. After the reading of the paper he missed Lottie and Ellen. No story seemed good now he could not read it out loud to them. After an evening at the hotel he returned to the house as late as possible and went straight to bed to try and go to sleep at once, but he was not comfortable in the bed.

He would have moved from Eastmount but had an idea he would be more lonesome in the city, having lived all his life in the village. Lottie had always lived in Eastmount. Everybody knew him and he was at home there. Now he was uncomfortable, but he had at times been uncomfortable in his own house, even when Lottie was living.

Hodgins wanted to be very friendly and got into the habit of coming over after supper to sit on Joe's veranda and talk until nearly dark. He talked about college football, fraternities at the University, and initiations, all of which very much interested Joe. Hodgins could tell a good story and Joe could tell a good story, so they got along nicely together. Joe eagerly looked forward to these visits, for people could not be nasty when Hodgins was friendly with him. Hodgins did not smoke, but confessed he liked the smell of tobacco, so they sat on the veranda, Joe reading stories from the papers to Hodgins. They talked about God occasionally, but in a big-hearted, broadminded way that appealed to Joe.

At dusk one evening they sat on the veranda, Hodgins rocking back and forth lazily, while Joe smoked his pipe and talked.

"The Fall is coming on now," Joe said.

"There's something about the Fall I like," Hodgins said thoughtfully.

"The Fall's a lonely time. The leaves blowing along the roads and over the field make me feel restless."

"Well, there's a month yet before October."

"That's right, but it gets dark early now."

"Everything's ripening."

"I'll tell you somethin'. I don't like hearing the wind rustling in dead leaves."

"That's funny, Mr. Harding."

"That's why I don't want the Fall to come on."

Hodgins began to quote some lines about "season of mellow fruitfulness," but got twisted and then laughed heartily. Joe did not laugh.

"Lottie was funny that way."

"What way? Quoting poetry?"

"No about the Fall." Joe was smoking his pipe carefully.

"Did she like it?"

"Yes."

"Most people like the Spring. Gee, there's going to be a swell moon on the lake to-night. Look."

They looked down the valley at the big gold moon low on the lake behind the broken line of birch-trees on the valley slope.

"Lottie used to like feeling blue in the Fall."

"Really blue?"

"No, but lonesome and half like crying because she liked it."

"Women are funny," Hodgins said.

"Lottie wasn't really funny. She just took fancies."

"Her mind was set on being baptized next week." Hodgins cleared his throat and was sorry he had mentioned it. Joe didn't even turn his head.

"It's kind of worth while to have some idea to lean against," Hodgins added.

"You never feel so lonesome, then," Joe said.

"That's it, Mr. Harding, that's exactly it. That's why there will always be religion."

"I suppose so."

"The whistle of that radial car sounds like a night hawk screeching," Hodgins said reflectively.

"Like a screech, when it gets dark."

"I guess I had better be going," Hodgins said, stretching his legs.

He smiled genially and walked down the path, his hat brushing against the leaves on the low branches of the haw-tree. Joe watched his tall figure turn down the road. By rights the haw-tree should be trimmed so it wouldn't brush against people's hats.

He sat on the veranda until dark, then got up to go down to the hotel. Hodgins was all right, he thought, and Dan was all right too, and he was glad to be able to like them both.

That evening, thinking of Hodgins and Lottie, he did not talk much to Dan and went home earlier than usual. Something had to be done to satisfy Lottie, if she could know about it. In the house he took off his coat, vest, and shoes, and sat at the kitchen table. An idea was growing stronger in his thoughts. It was necessary to do something to atone for everything that had happened so he could sleep in the night. That was it. He owed something to himself and something to Lottie, and had to do something to take the uneasiness out of his mind.

Lying awake in bed, he thought about the world and death and life, but no matter how he tried he found he could go back only so far. That was why he had stopped thinking about it when a young man. He couldn't get anywhere.

In the dark, lying alone in the big bed, he tried to go back to the beginning of things, until his head ached. There he was, lying in bed, there was the bed, outside was the moon and the stars and the lake. Well, what about it, where did it all come from? He remembered learning in school about masses swimming in space and now he thought about it eagerly but got tired wondering where the mass came from. Lottie was dead. She had believed in certain answers to a riddle he could not fathom. That was it. If he had an answer his head would not get tired

trying to go back beyond life. There was the moon and the stars to start with. The moon was a worn-out off-shoot from the earth, the earth was a planet. Stars in the sky were often planets. Life might conceivably be on all the planets. Canals were on Mars. Mars was the red planet shining over the lake. The school geography. Ellen had liked talking about Mars. What if people were up there. Where did they come from? God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Where did God come from? No one knew, no one would ever know. The Bible did not know, but maybe it did, for he didn't know the Bible very well. He was lying alone on the bed, that was all he knew. His thoughts were getting mixed up and he was tired. He went to sleep.

In the morning the sun was shining through the window and he forgot his thoughts of the night before and was glad he had work to do.

In the evening Joe had supper with the Kremers. When Mrs. Kremer was clearing off the table Joe and Ike had a talk, and Ike was saying, "You got to take things as they are."

"There's no use saying one thing and thinking another," Joe said.

"No, but it don't get you nowhere bucking against people."

"I don't want to go against people."

"That's what you're doing, Joe."

"No. I know you can go so far back and no farther. As you said, there's some things you can't get away from."

Joe didn't want to tell Ike of the strong feeling urging him to do something distasteful to him. "I got to do it for Lottie," he said to himself, and was restless, wishing it was over, eager for the peace that would follow. All day he deliberated until he boldly dallied with the idea and then made up his mind to have a talk with Hodgins. In the evening he tried to pray, but there in the room where he had knelt down with Lottie beside the bed he could mutter

only, "Oh, Jesus. Oh, Jesus," his mind excited and the thought becoming a wish, and soon he imagined he had a duty to perform for Lottie. He tried to regard the whole matter practically, but his head was feeling feverish and he imagined he saw a release from the long hours in the night and the uneasy restlessness in the morning. One way to do it. One thing Lottie would have wanted him to do.

Next evening Hodgins came down the road to sit on Harding's veranda. Joe saw him coming and was glad. Sitting there on the veranda talking was easy because Joe did not go straight to the point but preferred to lead up to it in a roundabout way.

"Well, what's the good word to-night, Mr. Harding?" Hodgins said.

"Nothing much. Things go pretty easy."

"Same here."

"How is the flock doing?"

"Oh, pretty well established now," Hodgins said blandly.

"Everybody satisfied, too."

"Just a few not."

"Looks like rain," Joe said thoughtfully.

"It rained this day last week," Hodgins said.

"It rained pitchforks and saw-logs for handles," Joe said.

"Anything worth while in the paper to-night, Mr. Harding?"

"Nothing much. Nothing worth reading."

Joe looked at Hodgins out of the corner of his eye, wondering how to go about it.

"How's that baptism of yours coming along?" Joe said.

"Oh, first rate. It's going to be the finest thing that's happened here in years. Dr. Morrow is coming down from the city to preach and help with the baptism. A big thing, Mr. Harding, a big thing. I must say I'm pleased. We had a rough time for a while but now I'm very pleased."

"You done well, all right."

"We might have done better," Hodgins said, smiling at Joe.

Joe laughed unnaturally and said, "Do you think I'd be a good candidate for the dipping?"

"I do. I really do. You're of a serious turn of mind."

"Then I may fool you."

"You won't fool us. We'll be glad to have you."

"I sometimes think there's something in it," Joe said uneasily, tentatively.

"It's food and drink to me," Hodgins said seriously.

It was dark and Hodgins should have gone down the road, but he rocked back and forth on the veranda. There was a moment of silence. Joe, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe, was unhappy. He was getting excited, the silence disturbed him, but he didn't know what to say.

"Do you hear those darn bull frogs?" he said.

"Yes, up the river a little."

"Such a croaking."

"Get on your nerves in the dark if you were alone up there."

"You get used to it."

Joe began to talk again about the barn and the baptism, then unexpectedly told Hodgins he had been thinking of being baptized. Hodgins stopped rocking, drawing his chair up closer to Joe, and began to talk so eagerly he twisted his words. He remembered the old argument about original sin and plunged into it, but Joe waved his hand impatiently, trying to make him understand original sin had nothing to do with it. "It's something I want to do. It's something I got to do," he said, trying childishly to make Hodgins understand the thoughts in his head. "It will be all right with me when I do that," he said. He did not want to mention Lottie or Ellen but thought Hodgins should understand how much he had been thinking of them.

Hodgins was very much moved. Again he rocked back and forth, hardly knowing what to say, glad of the darkness. "Let's think it all over," he said.

"I've thought it over," Joe said.

"Well I'll think about it and we'll talk it over," he said, getting up.

Joe stood up and there was a long, uncomfortable pause.

"That looks like a star out over there," Joe said

One star was shining through a rift in the clouds.

"Then it won't rain, I guess."

"No, I guess not. Good night."

12

Joe told Dan Higgins he was going to be baptized and Dan laughed so hard Joe left the hotel in disgust. Dan followed him out on the veranda to apologize, and Joe tried to make him understand why he had decided to do such a thing. Dan listened doubtfully, not quite knowing whether to take Joe seriously but said finally, "I guess we can still be friends, Joe."

"Sure, Dan, it's different with me. It's something I just got to do. I mean I'll feel better when I do it," Joe said, slightly embarrassed.

"Ike's going to be baptized, too."

"Well, Ike's all right, ain't he? You couldn't want a better man than Ike," Joe said eagerly.

"Ike's good company all right but you're different, Joe. It goes against your grain."

"It does and it don't, Dan. It's a thing I want to do now."

"It won't help your dead wife to do it," Dan said pointedly.

"I don't know. I'd like to do something."

Dan suggested Joe do nothing for a few months till the natural sorrow had passed away, but Joe shook his head stubbornly and said he knew what he wanted. Dan was sorry for Joe, so sorry he put one arm around his shoulder and asked him to stay at the hotel for the night.

"That house must be lonesome," he said. "It must get on a man's nerves." Joe was angry and left him. Dan would not take him too seriously.

The people who heard Joe Harding was going to be baptized nodded their heads appreciatively. It was only proper, they said; it was the best way to honor the memory of his dead wife and niece, and they recalled he had never been a scoffer like Jerry Hammond and always had had a good deal of the Christian spirit. The neighbors agreed a man had to be brought face to face with death to see the value of submitting to the dictates of his conscience, and these same people called on Joe, shook hands with him, and praised his depth of vision. He did not like it and didn't want to talk to them.

Every night for a week before the baptism Hodgins in the evenings talked to Joe on the veranda, trying in no way to hide his enthusiasm for Joe's conversion. He said frankly he would get more joy from Joe's baptism than from the baptism of twenty-four good souls whose faith had made possible the evangelical work in the village. Joe avoided talking very much about it. It was something that simply had to be done to make him feel good, that was all there was to it.

The days before Sunday went slowly but Joe was happier, having made up his mind to be definite. Twice he went to service in the barn, and though he did not listen very attentively, he had the pleasure that comes from the earnest performance of a duty, the satisfaction that comes to people who sacrifice themselves for an ideal, and singing the hymns and praying, he thought of the night Lottie had gone up on the platform. There he was in the barn doing what Lottie had done, trying to think her thoughts. After the service he went over to Kremer's house. Mr. and Mrs. Kremer had decided to be baptized together and she was very proud of it. That night in Kremer's parlor they agreed that Hodgins was a fine young man, a real

credit to the community, if induced to be the first pastor of a new Baptist church.

It rained all Sunday morning but cleared up at noon time. Joe was up early and the time passed slowly. Now the day of the baptism had come he was restless, wishing it was time to go down to the lake, and he was at moments inert, indifferent, but for the most part conscious of doing the right thing.

In the afternoon at twenty minutes to three he walked over to Kremer's place. He had on an old pair of pants and a khaki shirt and did not wear a hat. Under his arm he carried a change of clothing. Hodgins had advised all who were to be baptized to wear old clothes.

They went down the road together, hardly talking, for Joe was thoughtful and Mrs. Kremer was getting nervous. Over and over Ike assured her everything would come out all right. Not in years had so many automobiles come down the old road, and many were crossing the high-level bridge to park near the road house or on the grass alongside the valley road. People from the cars walked down the river. Joe and the Kremers went down the path by the bridge. The cement bridge over the river had three inches of water on it. It was in the hollow and small streams flowed down the road to the bridge.

"I guess Mr. Hodgins was right," Ike said.

"What do you mean?" Joe asked.

"He said an awful lot of people would come from all over to see it."

They walked down the river. The path was wet and slippery.

On the beach near the river mouth many people were assembled. More were coming down the path to see the baptism in the lake. Here and there in the crowd was a man or woman in old clothes and bared head, waiting to be baptized. The people who had come from the city to see the baptism were perched in favorable spots on the sparsely wooded hill sloping back from the shore line and

the river. The sun was shining but the grass on the hill was still wet.

By the time Hodgins and Mr. Harvey Simpson and his wife came down the path fully five hundred people were assembled on the beach and the slope of the hill. Hodgins was wearing a long black robe, hanging loosely on his tall frame. He carried rubber boots under his arm. Walking with him was a tall white-haired man with a high, round, shiny forehead and strong aquiline nose, wearing a similar black robe and carrying rubber boots. Mrs. Kremer told Joe he was Rev. Dr. Morrow from the city.

The twenty-four penitents in old clothes surged toward Hodgins, but were embarrassed by the presence of the stranger from the city, whom Hodgins treated so respectfully. Joe was aware of people staring at him, by his old clothes one of the penitents.

Hodgins and Dr. Morrow strode over to the rude pulpit of rough boards erected back from the water line, close to the slope of the hill. After a short consultation with Hodgins, Dr. Morrow climbed up to the pulpit and raised his arm on high, praying in a loud resonant voice. The crowd on the beach listened with bowed heads and the men and women on the hills were silent. Joe could hear only the passionate prayer of the minister and the steady lapping of the water on the beach. The sun went behind thick clouds gathering in the sky.

After praying, a hymn was sung, many people on the hill singing with those on the beach. Then Dr. Morrow, in a short address praising Hodgins's zeal, thanked God for giving a strong Christian spirit to Eastmount. He descended from the pulpit and Hodgins helped him put on the waist-high rubber boots. And then Harvey Simpson helped Hodgins with his rubber boots.

Hodgins called upon all who were to be baptized to gather around him. Joe and Ike and Mrs. Kremer edged close and soon he was hemmed in by the band of twenty-four in old clothes, bundles of clothing under their arms.

Hodgins quietly explained that Mr. Herbert MacIntosh had kindly consented to let them change their clothing, after the submerging, in his cottage, a short way along the beach.

A small procession was formed and the solemn little band, weebegone in their old clothes and uncovered heads, followed Hodgins and Dr. Morrow down to the edge of the water. Joe was walking opposite Rose MacIntyre, who was so nervous she could hardly keep from crying. The procession, close to the water, was hemmed in by the crowd.

Hodgins and Dr. Morrow, taking big awkward steps in the clumsy rubber boots, strode out in the water until it was waist high.

Hodgins, raising his hand, took a few steps toward the shore, beckoning Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Simpson to come toward him. Mrs. Simpson had on a long black robe similar to Hodgins's, but Harvey wore a good Sunday suit for the solemn occasion. They walked slowly, hands linked, until a few paces from Hodgins. Dr. Morrow, bowing and smiling encouragingly, reached out his hand to take hold of Mrs. Harvey Simpson, whose face was ashen pale. He put his left arm across her back and took her right hand in his.

He said in loud voice that all on the beach might hear, "My dear sister Simpson, do you believe in the Lord Jesus, the Savior, who died for you and rose again?"

She nodded her head, "I do."

"Then in the name of Christ and at his command I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost," he said, lowering her gently till submerged completely.

Harvey Simpson stood by inconsequentially while his wife was lifted up, the water streaming from her head. Hodgins helped Mrs. Simpson to the shore and she was taken along the beach to Herb MacIntosh's shack.

Joe stood on the shore, watching intently the dipping

of Simpson, who stuck his head out of the water, coughing and sneezing.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Kremer walked out in the water and Joe was left standing apart from the others on the beach, his heart beating unevenly. He felt as if he had been working hard, exhausting himself, but getting somewhere.

Six married couples were baptized in the lake. A young boy went with his father and mother out in the water. Dr. Morrow saw the boy coming and raising his hands high over his head cried, "What a great joy it is to see young people in general but boys and girls in particular saved by grace. Maybe the Lord will make of this boy a preacher to carry his word into far-off countries." And the trembling boy was dipped and carried to the shore by his father.

A few girls in black robes and colored bathing-caps were baptized.

Then Joe walked in the water that soaked through his boots and crept up coldly around his loins, chilling him until his teeth chattered. Hodgins clasped his hand, squeezing it, and Joe didn't want to look back at the people on the beach. The preacher from the city was talking but the words droned in Joe's ears, for he was chilled and trembling. The water was icy, his legs were numb, but the upper part of his body tingled with a strange exhilaration. Then his thoughts got twisted, and, staring at the water line on the minister's black robe, he was eager for humiliation. An arm was around his neck and he was looking at the broad pink cheek-bones of the minister, then his head sank beneath the surface of the water and he came up spluttering, the water streaming from his nearly bald head along matted strands of hair down to his forehead and into his eyes. He rubbed his eyes. He had done it. It was over. Something inside him was hurt but he had been eager to suffer and now felt the joy of release from a fixed purpose.

Joe waded quickly to the beach and all the people on the hill watched him, wet and bedraggled, hurrying along to

Herb MacIntosh's shack. Herb was sitting in front of the shack smoking his pipe. Herb nodded to Joe and said Mr. and Mrs. Kremer hadn't changed yet so he would have to wait. Joe, shivering, looked back but could see only the fringe of the crowd curiously interested in the behavior of all who were submerged in the lake. The ceremony would soon be over.

Ike came out of the shack and Mrs. Kremer followed him. Mrs. Kremer was blue around the lips but Ike was in good-humor.

"They should have a man in there with a towel to give a fellow a rub-down," he said to Joe.

Mrs. Kremer, still shivering, said, "You better change at once, Mr. Harding. You'll get your death of cold standing there like that."

In the old shack Joe changed his clothes rapidly, eager to get outside. He hurried back to the crowd around the pulpit.

After the ceremony in the water Hodgins and Dr. Morrow took off their rubber-boots. Hodgins ascended the rough pulpit. The small congregation was gathered around him but Hodgins spoke to the big crowd on the hill and along the beach. The presence of so many people stirred his imagination and he talked with fiery eloquence. Joe was glad he was one of the band who had been baptized.

Hodgins came down from the pulpit and it was Dr. Morrow's turn to say a few appropriate words, assuring the congregation Hodgins would surely be the first pastor of the new Baptist church in the village if they all joined in a call.

And then everybody sang, "Yes, we shall gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river." Dr. Morrow began to pray with turbulent eloquence. Many people on the hill knew the ceremony would soon be over and turned to go home.

It was nearly five o'clock. The surface of the lake was unbroken and the sun, now shining brilliantly, polished

the smooth water. Away along the beach to the west the gray bluffs towered up clearly. Men and women came down the hill to walk up the valley to the road. Dan Higgins, smoking a cigar, came over to Joe, who was looking around for Ike.

"How'd it go, Joe?" he said, hilarious about something.

"All right. I'm satisfied."

"Me, too."

"Why?"

"See the young fellow over there talking?"

"Yeah."

"He's a reporter from the city."

"Well?"

"He asked me if I got baptized and I told him yes. I said it was the happiest day of my life and he took it all down."

"I don't know as that was quite right," Joe said slowly.

"Shucks, Joe, you're all right. Let's go up the path together," Dan said, and, laughing, took Joe's arm.

They walked rapidly up the river because Dan wanted to be at the hotel when the crowd passed along the road. The beer and ale sign could be seen from the valley and the road.

In the hotel Joe talked idly with a few customers while Dan served drinks and sandwiches to a great many people.

At six o'clock they were alone in the bar-room. Joe knew Hodgins had gone into the city and would not return to the village for a few days, and, having nowhere to go, he ate a sandwich and drank a bottle of beer. He was in good humor. Dan was in good humor, too, because business had not been so good in a long time. He talked gaily about the baptism and wasn't a bit concerned about offending Joe, who listened good-naturedly, saying occasionally, "You're right and you're wrong, Dan."

And Dan said finally, "You don't think things are really going to be any different from now on, do you?"

"Of course not, I don't want things to be different. I

want things to be the same as they've always been," Joe said.

Sitting at the small square table, his glance alternating between the half-empty beer bottle and the red rims of Dan's bleary eyes, Joe did not feel like admitting he had been trying for days to live on in the old way and that his acceptance of Hodgins's faith and the baptism had been a gesture toward established opinion in the village.

Late at night he left the hotel and walked down the old road to the house. The nights were cool near the lake in the early fall. In the kitchen he hung his coat on the back of a chair. He made some strong tea. Lottie had always liked weak tea. He drank the tea methodically and then took off his collar and tie, twisting the tie carefully around the collar. And he thought of Dan Higgins and Hodgins and Jerry Hammond and Harvey Simpson and wanted to be friendly with everybody, though he would always like Dan better than anybody in the congregation. He was glad to be one of the congregation. It didn't do a man any good to stand alone. He could be quite comfortable in the village. Taking off his boots to put them under the stove damper, he felt that he was growing old and valued most a feeling of security.

In His
Own Country

IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

1

For an hour after lunch Bill lay on the sofa, his hands linked behind his head. Last evening he had talked for hours and now preferred his own thoughts. His mother rocked back and forth in her chair and talked to his wife.

Flora sat on a chair by the hall door, only half listening to Bill's mother, and glancing occasionally along the hall to the front screen door. It was hot in the house; a puff of cool air came along the hall. Tilting to one side in her chair, Flora looked through the screen door, beyond the iron gate at the sidewalk, at the gray dust road and at the field on the other side of the road. Wagon tracks had worn the road down hard and small stones jutted up. She felt moisture on her forehead and wished the old lady would finish her story, for Bill had promised to go swimming down at the blue drop. She looked at him anxiously, afraid that he might change his mind. His eyes were tired and he needed a long sleep. Though he had shaved in the morning, the hair was dark on his face, and black hair grew down on the back of his hands to his knuckles. His long legs were crossed at the ankles.

The old lady rocked steadily and Flora's eyes followed the knot of hair on top of her head, a dark switch twined with gray. Many times she had heard Bill's mother telling the story of her grandmother. Outside, down the street, probably at McGuin's, some one began to cut the grass on the front lawn, the mower grinding and squeaking, needing oiling. Slowly they were coming to the end of the story:

her grandmother, nervous and bewildered, had got off the boat just before it left the old land, and her husband hadn't missed her until they were a long way out. The poor woman had been terrified at the thought of going to a strange land, and so her husband had never heard of her again.

Flora, smiling, got up, leaning against the chair. She heard a horse trotting on the road. The buggy passed the door, swaying, the wheels grinding against the small stones on the road. Bill's mother said: "Your people were a bad lot, Bill, and there's no getting over it."

"Cheer up, Bill," Flora said. "Let's go for a swim."

"There's no getting over it, and Bill's the last."

"What's that you're saying, ma?" he said.

Without waiting for her to answer he got up and went into the kitchen to get the bathing-suits. His mother said she would stay there awhile and rest before going home. Bill put the bathing-suits over his left shoulder, opened the front door, and whistled as they walked along the street. He walked with a long, easy stride and she had to take his arm to keep up with him. The leaves on the maple-trees alongside the road were covered with gray dust. On Saturday afternoon the streets were quiet; everybody up at the park watching the lacrosse game. They walked south past the old quarry and beyond the sawmill at the end of the road to the wire fence near Smiley's orchard, heading for the blockhouse. Every year, going swimming, they went this way. It wasn't really a blockhouse, but was made of brick, and there were no windows, just a few air-holes facing the bay, though everybody liked to pretend it had been used years ago for Indian fighting. When they were kids Bill had found out that it had actually been used for storing dynamite, but when they climbed up-stairs and looked through the square holes out over the bay, they felt it ought to have been a blockhouse because the Indians could come over the bay from the reservation on the island.

Close to the shore the water was sand-colored, and small rocks and pebbles hurt the feet, but twenty feet farther out was the blue line and the drop. Always she limped hurriedly over the pebbles, and stood on the flat, smooth rock just before the drop. Bill was swimming easily ten feet ahead of her. She leaned forward to the water and, swimming jerkily, made a circle over the blue and came in as far as she could till her toes and knees touched bottom; then she paddled with her feet and crawled in on her hands.

She lay on the sand and called, "Heh, Bill," and put her hands over her eyes, shielding them from the strong sun. She heard Bill splashing the water. He sat down beside her shivering. His lips were blue. "It gets colder every year," he said. But the sun was good and they lay on their backs. Her eyes open, she saw beyond the tips of her toes to the blue bay and the outline of the island. Straining her eyes, she saw, to the left, a small sail-boat—opposite the summer cottages, she thought.

"I did some good thinking out there in the cold water." He jerked himself up suddenly and rubbed the hair on his chin with the palm of his hand.

"Why does the water get colder every year, Bill?"

"Come on now, Flora, girl; don't try and sidetrack me. Aren't you interested?"

"Honest to heaven above, I'm interested, only I know pretty well what you were thinking."

Though she knew he was offended, she had grown tired of listening to him. It was interesting, but at the moment too complicated for her. The sail-boat was out of sight beyond the bend. Behind them she heard shouting, kids playing in the bushes.

"I've been thinking it over," he was saying. "I ought to go down to the city to a place something like Saint Michael's College, and have a real talk about Saint Thomas Aquinas. Just to see if it's a bright idea. Of course I know it's a good one."

It sounded impressive for him to be thinking of going down to the city to one of the colleges. She reached for his hand and listened attentively. All last evening he had talked about Saint Thomas Aquinas and she had been unable to get to sleep. He had come home from the office with a clipping from the paper and had been so excited he had hardly eaten at all because the idea had come to him suddenly.

"Have you sorta cut out the pattern in your own head?" she asked.

"Gee, I'm glad you're still interested, Flora. How does it sound to you?" Sand clinging to his wet bathing-suit fell slowly as he talked.

"You go on and tell it. I'll just rest here with my eyes closed."

He talked slowly and at first she didn't listen attentively, for she knew the first part of the story. He had been working in the office of the town paper, reading a great many Sunday supplements to find one or two good feature stories they could reprint. He was alone in the office with old Johnny Williams, who owned the paper. Bill did most of the work. Johnny had often declared that when he died Bill would practically own the paper because he had no kids of his own or any other relatives. Bill read a story in a Sunday supplement about Saint Thomas Aquinas, a theologian and philosopher of the Middle Ages who had taken the Aristotelian philosophy and the learning of his time and rearranged it till it was acceptable to the church and a basis for a new Christian culture. Theology and philosophy became parts of the one system. The professor who had written the article had been enthusiastic, and Bill understood readily that Saint Thomas was the superman of the Middle Ages. The story for her had been uninteresting till he developed an idea that had occurred to him after reading the article the second time. A man like himself, willing to work hard, might become the Saint Thomas of to-day, though of course he wouldn't need to

bother with philosophy, since the present conflict was between science and religion. All he had to do was make a plan of different fields of science and show definitely that it could become one fine system in accordance with a religious scheme.

"It's too bad I'm not religious," he said; "but it's too bad I'm not scientific, though I might acquire a scientific mind, don't you think?"

Her eyes were closed and she heard some one calling in a high voice back near the stream. "Here, chook, chook, chook!" Mrs. Simpkins, from the stone cottage near the stream, was feeding the chickens. Often the chickens walked across a narrow plank spanning the stream and scratched in the field opposite the house. Two weeks ago some one hiding in the trees had stolen three of the hens. Bill was saying quietly and slowly: "If a fellow would be willing to work, it oughtn't to be too tough a job."

A breeze from the bay made her shiver. She sat up and said sincerely: "Are you going to do it, Bill?"

"Going to do what?"

"Be something like this man. Saint Thomas, I mean."

"I guess so, but I don't know exactly," he laughed happily. "I just been doing a little thinking. You know what it's like with me. I always like to work a thing out from all angles."

"Of course you wouldn't make a barrel of money, but I mean could we get along at all on the idea?"

"No, it mightn't mean much that way, but . . ."

She put her head on his shoulder. They followed with their eyes a wave line on the bay. "Billy, you do have fine thoughts," she said.

"Lord, no, Flora!" He was embarrassed and reached for a pebble. "See if I can hit the wave line before it breaks."

"No. Listen; I'll bet a dollar you'll get your name in the papers and the town'll do something about it later on."

She drew closer to him so he could understand that she belonged to him entirely and believed in his importance. He put his arm, dried from the sun, on her back, but her bathing-suit, where she had been lying on it, was still wet, so he withdrew his arm. "Sure bet your boots that I'll kill dead things and you can't go wrong," he said genially. Without knowing why, they both started to laugh and, standing, up, they linked arms to walk along the beach to the blockhouse.

The door had been torn away and he stood outside and threw stones at the water until she got dressed. Older people usually bathed on the beach in front of the summer resort, but Bill had been coming down to the blue drop for years. When they got dressed they squeezed and twisted the bathing-suits and he hung them over his shoulder. Crossing the stream they stepped from one dry rock to another. He held down the top strand of the wire fence for her. On the dusty road they walked more rapidly. It was five o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was very bright. Few houses were at this end of the road. Over the tops of the houses, beyond the town and curving westward, was the line of the blue mountains. Cultivated fields, pale yellow in sunlight, were on the slopes of blue hills. Flora's father had a farm on a gentle slope of the hills, eight miles northwest of the town.

On the board walk, opposite Tanner's new three-story brick house, Bill noticed that one of the bathing-suits was drying, and taking it off his shoulder he flicked it at tall weeds alongside the walk. The weeds close to the road were dust-covered and had no color. He kept on flicking the weeds mechanically.

"Take the frown off your face," she said.

"I'm not frowning."

"Brighten up," she said, but knew that he was having fine thoughts, and watching the shifting expressions on his face fascinated her. Two or three playful words came easily to her lips but she remained serious and attempted

to follow his thoughts in her own head. At the point where she had left off, at the beach, she started again, though it was involved and she felt that she had lost track of it. Instead she took Bill's arm, and, passing Samson's cottage, noticed that they had a new shade and curtains on the front window.

The cinder path on their street looked much cooler than the board walk. The two-storied cement house was fourth from the red rough-cast one on the corner; then there was Fulton's cottage and McGuin's frame house.

Bill said solemnly before going into the house that it was funny no one in the whole world had ever had an idea like his. "Of course it must be remembered that this Saint Thomas had it soft in some ways. The world was nothing to write home about in those days, and it's some world now. I'd like to talk it over, but few people would take it all in."

"It's such a splendid notion," she said, "though it seems so far away."

"It is far away, but, honestly, it don't sound nutty, does it?"

"Nutty!" she said indignantly, her hand on the door-knob; "I should say not. No one else in town could ever think of such a thing if they thought a million years."

Through the open door Mike, the fox-terrier, jumped at Bill and he kept slapping it on the belly, rolling it on the floor, while Flora went along the hall to the kitchen. The dog barked while she worked in the kitchen slicing tomatoes for an early supper; then she heard Bill running around the side of the house, the dog squealing eagerly. The tomatoes were sliced, so she leaned on the table and knew Bill was hiding, for there was no sound. Then his feet thudded on the sod, the dog growled and barked, and she smiled. Later on, just before she called him to supper, the dog kept on barking noisily in the back yard, and, sure that Bill was teasing him, she rapped on the window-pane authoritatively for fear he might annoy the neighbors.

After supper he lay on the sofa and played his mouth-organ. Some of the tunes she liked and kept time, moving the dish-towel in a circle on a plate, but newer tunes were raucous and she called: "For heaven's sake, Bill, keep to the ones you know." The dishes were dried and the table cleared, and he had played most of his tunes. It was too early to go down-street to the movies. They sat on the front veranda watching groups of boys coming down the road, more people than had been on the street all afternoon.

"I wonder who won the lacrosse game," Bill said.

"Here comes Joe Boyle on his wheel. Ask him."

Joe Boyle, pedalling easily, was opposite the house and Bill yelled: "Heh, Joe! Tell us who won the game."

Joe stopped pedalling but didn't get off his wheel "Meaford," he yelled, and kept on going.

2

Not since the time the doctor thought his mother had a cancer had Bill taken anything so seriously. The new thoughts and intentions that he suggested Flora couldn't understand, and one night, by comparison, estimated their importance to him. She knew nearly everything that had happened to him in the last twelve years, since they had met at high school. Her father drove her in from the farm and Bill had always lived in town. They kept company for ten years, and married when Bill got enough money to build a house, ten minutes' walk from Main Street.

Standing at the window of the front room upstairs she looked westward to the station and the water-tower, and over the roof of the station to the steel beams of the shipyard. Most men worked in the yard, but Bill was ambitious and preferred to work for lower wages in *The Standard* office. For two months there hadn't been a boat in the dry dock and no work in the yard, though Bill was

busy getting out *The Standard* twice a week. Every night at five o'clock he came home, usually in good humor.

To-night he said solemnly: "I'm going down to the library right after tea." Timidly she asked if he would leave the story that had at first interested him so she could go over it again. He took the paper out of his pocket mechanically. The edges were frayed and, unfolding it, she thought she had torn it. Bill hurried out so that he could have at least an hour in the library before closing-time, and she laid the story about Saint Thomas on the white table oilcloth. There was a big picture of Saint Thomas—not a very attractive-looking man, she decided—and a picture of a Greek, Aristotle, whom she remembered from the ancient-history books in high school. She read two paragraphs and her thoughts wandered, so she started over again. She read all the way through, then dropped her head to her plump arms and closed her eyes. The Middle Ages were far away. Bill's point of view was easier to appreciate when she thought first of Napoleon, then of Alexander the Great, and then of Lord Nelson, and quickly thought of Saint Thomas at the same time. "I wonder what Bill's really going to do," she thought. It was getting dark in the kitchen. It was not dark outside, so she went out to the back yard and stood on the step.

In the yard next door little Mrs. Fulton was picking rhubarb, three light-green stalks conspicuous among red ones in the bunch under her arm. Flora took hold of the clothes-line, twanged it three times, and picked up the clothes-prop lying on the grass. A peach-tree was between her and Mrs. Fulton. She ran the clothes-prop along the line beyond the peach-tree. Mrs. Fulton saw her finally and called: "Nice evening, Mrs. Lawson."

Still holding the clothes-prop, she moved over to the fence and said, "That Bill, of course, he is off again to the library." She liked telling people that Bill went frequently to the library. Mrs. Fulton's husband was a riveter

in the shipyard and never went to the library. "He's got important work to do there," she added.

"If my man don't soon get some kind of work to do, we're leaving here, that's what we're doing. The town is going to the dogs."

"It's not much of a place for a man that's ambitious."

"Nor much of a place for a man that wants to earn a living."

"Bill may have to go down to some of the libraries in the city."

"That's very interesting, Mrs. Lawson. What kind of work would it be now? Something for the paper?"

Flora closed her mouth abruptly. She was anxious to tell the woman about Bill and the extraordinary work that he was undertaking, for everybody in town ought to hear about it, but she had no words to explain it properly. She said quickly: "I got to walk down the road a bit and meet Bill."

Mrs. Fulton turned away. Flora went around the house to the front walk. The evening was warm and she walked slowly, because the library didn't close till nine o'clock and she knew the road Bill would take on the way home.

On the road near M. P. Starr's red brick house, with the smooth green lawn and carefully clipped hedges, was a small creek and an old wooden bridge. She stood on the bridge looking down at the stream. The middle of the stream was shallow and clear, but at the margin the water was foul with green scum on small ponds. A frog croaked farther up the stream. Turning, she made a croaking noise in her throat, then hoped no one in Starr's house had heard it. Mrs. Starr, who dressed expensively, merely nodded to her when they met on the street and had never asked her in to have a cup of tea with the neighbors. She rested her elbows on the rail. Some one was coming along the road, a big wide-shouldered man with felt hat and a khaki shirt open at the throat.

"Hello, Flora," he said.

"Hello, Pete."

Pete Hastings, an old friend, leaned against the railing and grinned. His brother had a farm up Meaford way, though Pete lived mostly in town. Bill didn't like Pete, who used to take her out riding a long time ago. He had a wide mouth and very strong teeth, and huge palms that he slapped together when there was nothing further to say.

"Taking a little walk, Flora?"

"Nope, Pete; just waiting around for Bill. He's down at the library."

"Yeah, what's he doin' there when he ought to be giving you the time of your life?"

Pete had a handsome generous way of making conversation. He leaned back against the rail to have a long talk.

A man was adjusting carbons in the corner light. When the light came on it seemed darker on the bridge, a wide circle of light on the road at the corner, and beyond that much darker than before. Flora heard Pete talking and looked down the road for Bill. Three young fellows, appearing under the corner light, lay down in the long grass near the pole, and one laughed gaily while two talked quietly, and she knew that later on other fellows would come down from the park and eight or nine of them would sprawl in the grass, telling jokes and waiting for a girl to pass so they could make whistling noises and laugh out loud. The constable had said once that young fellows on the corner did nothing but hatch mischief. Bill had said that if there was no work in the town, and they had no money to go down to the beach for an evening, they had to do something.

"If Bill's so busy," Pete said, "do you think he'd mind if we went for a walk some evening, a little walk down by the lake, or out on the pier at the dock?"

"No, Bill don't like you much. He doesn't like your

ways. He wouldn't like it finding me here on the bridge talking so much with you when it's dark."

"Ho, ho; well, now, is that so? Bill's so serious with his big ideas, a bit of a walk by the lake or on the grass would get his goat for sure."

"And I'm just as glad it would."

"No need to get huffy, Flora."

"He's got a new idea. It's something that'll make his name heard over the mountains and beyond the bay. It'll go farther than that railroad track and into all the big cities." She pointed toward the station.

"Quit your kidding, Flora. Them tracks go a long ways."

"I know, Pete, but no one'll keep up to Bill. He'll always be ahead of you, like the sun glinting on a track and you trying to catch up on it."

"Don't make me laugh. Let's talk about old times when you was the nicest little girl I ever had."

She felt suddenly that she was leaning too comfortably against the railing, talking easily with Pete Hastings. He was a loafer, a man of loose ways, according to Bill, but always ready to make fine conversation. It was dark and people passing on the bridge might see her with him and gossip. Again the frog croaked and she said: "It's pretty dark, Pete."

"Yes, it's pretty dark," he said quietly. "It's nice dark." He spoke sincerely, as though he believed it intensely, and she was nervous and moved away from him, hesitating at the corner of the bridge.

"I'm going, Pete," she said.

"Going?"

"Yes, I'm going; it's dark."

She had explained what she meant simply by saying that it was dark. She heard footfalls coming along the board walk, a man walking rapidly in the shadow, and knew the swing of the shoulders when he came closer.

"Oh, Bill!" she called. He crossed from the other side of the road.

"'Lo, Bill," Pete said easily. "Well, so long, Flora, see you again, eh, Bill?" He walked down the road toward Main Street. Bill watched him until he was out of sight. Then he said mildly: "You surely weren't out walking with that bum, were you, Flora?"

"Don't be so silly, Bill. I was walking down-street to meet you and bumped into Pete."

"He's one guy it's easy to bump into."

"I guess he's got lots of time to hang around."

"All right, take my arm and we'll go home, though I wish I was a foot taller and I'd bang him on the nose."

"You're an old silly, Bill."

"I'm not so silly; I just don't like him."

"Who does?"

They walked back to the house. She lit the lamp in the kitchen. She placed the lamp in the centre of the kitchen-table and they both sat down. Tilting back in the chair, his long legs stretched out, he began to tell her about the visit to the library. He talked and slapped the palm of his hand gently on the table for emphasis. He had gone into the library to find anything worth while about scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages. Not that he was interested in philosophy; he wanted to see what this man Saint Thomas had been up against in the Middle Ages. The library had no decent material for him; it was probably the worst library in the whole country. After wasting half an hour he had leaned against a desk talking to the librarian, Miss Hedges, an old maid. Something about Miss Hedges was a bit peculiar, a woman of thirty-five, so very timid, and imagining one was always being personal. At times in the middle of a sentence, talking convincingly to Miss Hedges, he had stopped abruptly, feeling that if he went on rapidly she would suddenly scream, as though insisting that the words he was using in no way expressed his thoughts. "The woman is a fool," he said,

"and simply needs a little exercise." But in the library he could find nothing about Saint Thomas that was worth while. He had asked Miss Hedges if she had ever heard of a great work like a summary of all known fields of science, to demonstrate the relation between science and, offhand, religion. Miss Hedges was surprised at first, and then, like a very ignorant person, she had laughed and said she didn't believe there was such a book. Of course there wasn't. But the woman was a fool, and the library was useless.

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Bill?" she asked timidly.

"I'm going to make a beginning."

"How are you going to make a beginning?"

"I'm going to start in on some summaries. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to write a book on geology. Not a text-book, but a summary of what is known about geology, and show it should all justify the faith of a religious man."

"But listen, Bill, you're not religious."

"I know I'm not. Don't kid me about it."

"But don't you think you ought to be, to do the job right?"

"I suppose so," he said casually, but I'm willing to take all that side of it for granted for the time being."

"Honest, Bill, there'll never be anybody like you."

He grinned at her and reached out to pat her hand. He was pleased but embarrassed.

"Better turn down that lamp-wick. It's beginning to burn," he said.

"Tell you what," she said. "Let's have some ice-cream. I'll pay for it out of my own money. You go down to Millar's and get it, and I'll cut some cake."

"It's a fine night for ice-cream at that. I'll go. Where's the dog?"

"Probably in the front room, sleeping on the best chair."

"Here, Mike," he called. The dog, in the front room, jumped on the floor.

"Aren't you going to put on a coat?"

"No, it's too warm for a coat really. Come on, Mike."

She got dishes out of the pantry and some fruit cake. A story about old Mrs. Doherty, who was doting, occurred to her and her lips moved, making phrases to use telling it to Bill. She heard an engine whistle and glanced at the clock on the wall by the window. The hooting of the whistle got louder and the clanging of the bell slower and the shunting clearer. "The nine-twenty-five is fifteen minutes late," she thought, hurrying up-stairs in the dark to the front window. She leaned out, looking across the field and down the path to the station lights. People, getting off the train, walked along the station platform. Always she watched for any one who might cut across the path by the water-tower, heading for her house. Leaning out the window, waiting, she thought of Pete Hastings talking to her on the bridge—a funny fellow who puzzled her sometimes. No one came along the path by the water-tower. Out of sight, on the cinder path, she heard Bill talking to the dog. Listening eagerly, as he came closer, she heard him saying: "And what do you think we ought to do about it, Mike, old boy?" She hurried down-stairs and when he came in wondered why she had thought of Pete, leaning out of the window.

3

In the evenings he worked harder than during the day-time at the office. She had expected him to sit at the table in the front room when he began to study earnestly; instead he moved up-stairs to her small sewing-room, declaring it a splendid office. She tried to follow his progress. For an hour after tea she worked in the kitchen, washing the dishes, sewing, or ironing; then deliberately

went up-stairs and said: "How is it coming, Bill?" Sometimes he was reading carelessly, feeling his way among six books a high-school teacher had loaned him, and answered good-naturedly: "It's a big field." Once, pointing to the pile of books, he said: "Flora, old girl, how would you like to reduce all that to about a hundred swift pages?" That was the last time he seemed pleased to hear her moving behind him.

The sewing-room was too small for a table, so he used part of the machine as a desk. A summer dress she had been altering became too difficult for hand stitching, and on Friday afternoon, at three o'clock, she used the machine in the sewing-room. Carefully she removed his books and piled them on the floor. He came home early and because of the sound of the machine she didn't know he was in the house till he cleared his throat behind her. She was leaning over the machine. Startled, she straightened up quickly and waited for him to speak first, wondering why she had a guilty feeling.

"A lot you care!" he said angrily. "Going and moving work like that. Why didn't you throw it out while you were at it?"

He kicked the pile of books across the floor and ran down-stairs.

She put her arms on the machine and felt weak, and could not move, though wanting to hurry after him. She felt like a little girl who would never be able to appreciate the harm she had done. For five minutes she sat there, gradually becoming indignant, till she jumped up suddenly and hurried down-stairs repeating to herself harsh words she would use on him. He was sitting in the front room on the black leather sofa. A picture of his father and mother hung on the wall directly over his head. She had time to notice the picture on the oatmeal wallpaper because he simply stared at her, bending forward, his face white and tapering. The match clenched between his teeth bobbed up and down. She stood near him and was

afraid to speak, and would have calmly turned to walk from the room but knew he would follow her with his eyes. Nervously she sat down beside him, putting her hand on his shoulder. Twice he pushed the hand away, but finally permitted her to explain, smoothing his hair, that she would arrange the sewing-room so neatly he would never know she had been in it. His head jerked back and he bit the match in two, but didn't answer. She went up-stairs, tidied the room carefully, came down, and sat alone on the front veranda.

Twenty minutes later she heard him going up-stairs again and was disappointed that he hadn't come out on the veranda to speak to her.

In the evenings he went on working up-stairs and she never disturbed him. For an hour after supper they gossiped peaceably, then he rubbed the palms of his hands together, cleared his throat, and pushed back his chair from the table, ready to work for three hours. She sat alone on the veranda until twilight, when it was too dark for him to write; then went into the kitchen and lit two lamps and carried one up-stairs, entering the sewing-room unobtrusively without disturbing him. Always he said vaguely, "Thanks, Flora," hardly lifting his head.

Three times in a week she walked over to Dolly Knox's for the evening. Dolly and her husband "Curly" kept a grocery-store, and in the winter evenings played five-hundred with Flora and Bill. The first time in the week she called on them they talked about Bill's work and "Curly" found it very amusing, and Dolly, who was pretty, though untidy, advised her to put a firecracker under Bill's hat so he would come down to earth. "If Curly left me alone in the evenings, I'd go travelling, far from the old folks at home," Dolly said.

"Of course he doesn't really leave me alone," Flora said quickly. "He's there in the house with me."

She had gone to school with Dolly and liked her cheerful silly ways, but on the way home, talking to herself, she

resented Knox's casual opinions, for, even if "Curly" and Bill were friendly, the Knoxes weren't good enough to dust Bill's boots. So in the evenings she walked by herself, or went down to the show. After the show once she thought she saw Pete Hastings standing at a corner talking to some men. Walking slowly, she hoped he would see her; then suddenly decided it would be better to go home alone. Gladly she would have walked with him; only she kept on wondering whether it would be right or wrong, and it annoyed her to have to think about it. She never stayed out late. She would have to pass the fellows sprawled in the grass under the corner light.

At eleven o'clock in the evening Bill came down-stairs, very tired, and they sat at the kitchen table. If he was in good humor, she made some toast on the stove while he took Mike for a short run. If he was tired and sullen, he undressed slowly, taking off his shirt and shoes in the kitchen.

Before going out to work one morning he said to her: "Flora, I'm going down to the city to-morrow morning. I've started in on this thing, and I think it's the most interesting idea in the world."

"Who are you going to see in the city?"

"Somebody at one of the colleges, I hear that Saint Michael's is the one. They teach scholastic philosophy there, and of course they'll know all about Saint Thomas Aquinas."

"Are you going to tell them all about it?"

"I'll tell them all about it and get somebody interested. Maybe they would be willing to help a fellow a lot."

"I feel it in my bones that you'll impress them, Bill."

Early next morning he got up to take the seven-thirty train to the city. He would be home later in the evening, so he didn't carry a club bag. He kissed her warmly and walked across the road to take the path across the field by the water-tower. Up-stairs she watched him from the front window, walking with his head down a little, his straw

hat tilted far back on his head. The fox-terrier was following him, trotting easily, his nose to the path. Bill's legs looked very long, walking across the field. It was a dull morning and the sky was gray.

Her eyes got moist, she was so proud of him; and, sitting on the bed, she said: "I'm a silly, an old silly."

She told herself severely that she ought to be happy; there was no excuse for feeling lonely now, since she was practically alone in the house all the time from morning till night. Every day, though, he came home at noon-time.

Early in the afternoon she went down-street to buy groceries. The main street was brick, the widest of any town in the county. It had been built in days when people believed the town would become the biggest railroad centre on Georgian Bay, and the shipyard for the upper lakes. In those days not many people lived in the town and laborers for the shipyard were brought from the city. Now there were few trains and not many boats for the yard. But there was always the wide brick street. Coming out of Dorst's butcher-store Flora met Mrs. Fulton. The sky had cleared and sunlight was on the wide street. The butcher had thrown pails of water on the sidewalk in front of the store to cool the air.

"On the way home, Mrs. Lawson?" Mrs. Fulton asked.

"Yes, but I was thinking of seeing what's on to-night at the nickel show."

"We can walk over there and down Pine Street home."

They passed the nickel show and saw the posters. Flora told Mrs. Fulton that Bill had gone to the city to see the head of Saint Michael's College. All the way home Mrs. Fulton listened and Flora talked rapidly. Just why had he gone to the city, Mrs. Fulton asked, and twice Flora was ready to explain, but remembered it ought to be kept a secret.

"It's important. They want Bill to look up something for them in the town here," she said, nodding her head vigorously. To mollify Mrs. Fulton, she added: "There's

lots of things, of course, the likes of us don't understand at first sight, if you know what I mean."

"If it's something that has to be kept in the dark . . ."

"No, no, it ain't that."

"It does sound as if I'm digging it out of you."

"I'm not minding it at all, Mrs. Fulton. Here we are home anyway."

For supper she had sliced oranges, brown bread, and a cup of tea. Recently she had got plump—not noticeably fat, but, with her dress off, her shoulders and back looked fat, and she had promised Bill to abstain from starchy foods and eat vegetables, fruit, and brown bread for a month.

At seven o'clock she went down-town to the picture show to see the feature picture and part of the comic before the train came in. The Spanish feature picture was exciting and two bull-fighters pleased her. She forgot that she was alone in the show. The comic was less interesting; her thoughts wandered, she closed her eyes and imagined she had followed Bill all afternoon. In the city station she was right behind him, getting off the train, and he looked around for a restaurant. Or maybe he had gone to a hotel because he was naturally neat and tidy and would prefer a good wash. Early in the afternoon he went up to the college. She imagined him standing between tall pillars, speaking to some one with a bald head. She opened her eyes suddenly, her hands moist and cold, nervous because she had no idea what Bill might say. If he were asked too many questions his thoughts might get twisted; then she smiled to herself, watching the comic again, for Bill was far too serious to be long without words.

After the show she walked on Main Street. Most young fellows with good clothes walked along the street after it got dark. They walked sometimes four abreast when without girls. She went as far west as Findlay's flour-and-feed store and down two blocks to the station. The nine-twenty-five was on time, and she hurried, cutting across the

well-kept station lawn, hoping no one would see her. She was on the platform when Bill got off the train. He kissed her awkwardly, as though people were watching, and, without speaking, they crossed the tracks in front of the engine, the bell still clanging. Always when she crossed in front of an engine to take the path home she got a nervous thrill, imagining the engine might suddenly move forward the very moment she tripped on the track. On the path she said: "How'd it go, Bill?"

"Not so good."

"As good as you expected?"

"Nope."

Standing on the station platform in the light from the waiting-room he had seemed tired and worried, and she decided not to ask questions until they got home. She tried now to see the expression on his face, but there was no moon and it was dark. It looked like rain. The air was heavy and the tall grass still. Her feet felt hot and she wondered what Bill would have thought if she had come down the path to meet him in her bare feet.

She lit the lamp in the kitchen and drew two chairs up to the kitchen-table. "Come on now, Bill, tell me about it."

Yawning, he stretched his legs, avoiding her eyes, his hands fumbling awkwardly in his pockets. "There's nothing to tell," he said.

Her lips moved, staring at him. She turned away quickly. She looked at the lamp, then listened intently, as though a noise outside had aroused her. "Is that the wind on the bushes, or does it sound like rain?" she said.

"I don't hear anything," he said mildly.

"It's just the wind on the bushes."

"Now I hear the leaves rustling."

"Well, Bill, what turned up in the city?"

"I told you nothing turned up."

"What did they say at the college?"

"They didn't say anything at the college."

"What's the matter, Bill? You don't need to get sore."

Can't you tell whether you went to the college?"

"All right, I guess I can. I'm a fool. I guess I'm a rube. I didn't get to the college. There now, you know all about it."

He looked at her directly, to observe closely every line on her face, telling her that he didn't go to the college. "Aw gee, that's too bad, Bill" she said, pulling out the table-drawer, her fingers groping for three spoons to fit together neatly so he wouldn't see that she wanted to cry.

Slowly, as though it had happened a long time ago, he told about the day in the city. First he had got something to eat that had cost thirty-five cents. After a good wash, in a toilet adjoining a restaurant, he had inquired the way to Saint Michael's College. On the city streets he walked for three-quarters of an hour, rehearsing the story he would tell. The first time it sounded impressive, but the third or fourth time it was strangely muddled it hardly seemed to be his own story. By the time he arrived at the college he almost believed that he had no story to tell. The college is an old gray brick building, one side facing the car-tracks, the street at the front leading to Queens Park and other colleges. Walking slower, he turned in at the main gate. He turned, walking away, repeating the story to himself, and was half-way through it when two men in long black soutans and Roman collars came out of the main door, pacing up and down the cement walk in front of the building. He couldn't help watching them because he knew he ought to approach them, explain himself, ask whom he ought to see. Distracted, he felt there was nothing on earth to say to any one. He felt foolish, his lips were dry, and he muttered to himself some words about Saint Thomas Aquinas; then got the notion that the two men with Roman collars would have been tired walking long ago if they hadn't been watching him. A church forms one wing of the college. The door was open and the pews looked very cool in the shadows inside the

church. He entered by this door and sat down at the back of the church, sweating and uncomfortable. He mopped his head with his handkerchief and watched the two teachers through the open door. They were out of sight and in the college; he left the church at once.

At the street corner he was ashamed of himself and walked twice around the college, gradually convincing himself it would be a waste of time talking to anybody while he was so unhappy.

In Queens Park he sat down for an hour until he felt better, and knew he ought to have finished his work at home entirely before talking about it to anybody. So he asked a fellow walking in the park the way to a decent library. The rest of the afternoon he spent in a reference library getting some excellent information, and was happy till the librarian in the reading-room, to whom he indicated the kind of material he was seeking, told him he might be interested in an English magazine called *The New Criterion*. He enjoyed this magazine till he read a long review of a book about an early philosopher named "Duns Scotus." The idiotic reviewer attempted to show that "Duns Scotus" was really more acceptable to the early Christian church than Saint Thomas Aquinas: obviously it was idiotic. He got into a rage and tossed the magazine across the table, jumped up, and hurried out of the reading-room. He had half an hour before train-time, so he walked to the station.

"So you see it was a bad afternoon all the way round," Bill said.

"It's queer, downright queer," she said, and added cheerfully: "The trouble was you simply got a bad feeling thinking too much about it."

"I guess so."

"Oh, that's it all right."

"Maybe so."

"Shucks, Bill, let's get something to eat."

"Not me, I'm tired. I'm going right up-stairs to bed."

He left the kitchen. She heard him going up-stairs, his feet moving slowly. She put her arms down on the table and was sorry for Bill and started to cry softly. She had a heavy feeling because he had told his story. It was over, nothing could possibly come of it. She cried quietly, then rubbed her eyes, powdered the lids, and went up-stairs to bed.

4

She thought that the trip to the city ought to have discouraged him, but he determinedly worked much harder. He was amused when she talked as if he needed sympathy.

She got tired of going to the show alone and of walking down the street to talk to old Mrs. Lawson. Dolly and "Curly" Knox called on her one evening and asked her to get into the Ford with them and go down to Wasaga Beach. The three of them sat in the front seat and on the road beyond town "Curly" sang some new popular songs. Many cars were on the road to the Beach. The bigger cars, passing them, left them trailing in a cloud of dust that angered "Curly." Dolly laughed at him and he became good-humored again, and they all sang happily. At the Beach they went to the dancing-pavilion, and "Curly" danced first with Flora and then with Dolly, sometimes bumping into young city fellows staying in the cottages on the shore, and admitting to Flora that he did it because they danced better than he did. Flora was happy until it was time to go home and girls got into cars with fellows so contentedly that she felt like a gooseberry, sitting beside "Curly" and Dolly all the long drive home in the moonlight. They talked out loud and laughed and sang; the shadows in the bushes and the moonlight on the narrow road pleased her, though she kept on feeling she ought to be in the back seat with Bill, who would pinch her leg, or tease "Curly."

At home Bill was still working up-stairs. Instead of going up-stairs and talking to him, she sat alone in the dark in the front room. "He's a fool," she thought, trying to look out the front window. Outside the street was quiet. Then a car came along the road, going slowly, some one in the back seat playing a ukelele, and she wished she were sitting beside him encouraging him to strum loudly. Leaning forward, listening carefully, she heard the strumming faintly, the car a long way down the road; then she leaned back and giggled, thinking the ukelele player mightn't be a man at all. "I ought to put a light in this room if I'm going to sit here," she said aloud. But a thought of Bill approaching people timidly in the city and practically walking around in circles began to amuse her and she sat there. She indulged her fancy and had him go round and round in circles, the circles always getting bigger. She stroked her round knees softly, giggling in the dark. Straightening up to get her breath she whispered: "Just as though he had a bat in the belfry."

She went up-stairs to the bedroom and began to undress quietly and slowly. On the bed, listening, she hoped Bill had heard her laughing down-stairs and would come into the bedroom and complain angrily that she shouldn't be in a house with serious people. Then she would stretch lazily on the bed and laugh out loud at him till she got a stitch in her side.

Only one thin sheet covered her body and the bed felt good. Her legs were resting nicely, feet far apart so she would feel no warmth from any kind of contact. If any one got into bed with her, she would have to put her feet closer together to give him room. Suddenly afraid of her own thoughts, she muttered, "I feel crazy to-night," but stubbornly permitted herself to enjoy delicious sensations from thoughts she knew ought not to be in her head. Before going to sleep she hoped Bill would not get into bed at all that night. Some time later she woke up quickly.

Some one had opened the front door and was walking in the hall. Wide awake, she sat up. She was alone in the room, and knew she had heard Bill down-stairs. He had gone for a long walk before going to bed.

Two weeks later she told Bill it would ruin his health to be up half the night wandering around the streets. He shrugged his shoulders. "It will be a good deal better if you don't bother about such things at all," he said. Clinching his fists, he glared at her as though expecting stubborn resistance in an argument. "I got my work to do, you got yours; that's about all we can say," he said.

"I'll not care a snap of my fingers what you do from now on."

"All right, only don't get sore. The main thing is, this is very serious with me."

"I was never so serious in all my life."

"Nor have I been so serious in all my life."

"Nor in all my days."

"Nor in all my days."

"Stop it; do you hear, Bill?"

He laughed suddenly and got up from the table to go to work. "Don't get rattled, Flora. Life's too short."

In the afternoon she walked alone down by the pier near the grain-elevator. The tin on the side of the elevator facing the water was brown and rusty. Boards on the pier were loose and through the wide cracks she saw the dark water underneath. Close to the pier the water was dark; pieces of paper, scum, small sticks bobbed against the posts. She was walking on the pier out beyond the elevator. An uncle of hers had once looked after the elevator, but in those days you couldn't pass the open door without getting covered with grain dust. Now an old man sat on a stool, back from the edge of the pier. A boat hadn't been in all summer. She sat down at the farthest solid section of the pier, and broke off small pieces of wood from the rotten boards and tossed them into the water. Across the strip of water on the next pier some

kids were swimming, one boy diving beautifully. The kids were shouting, swimming rapidly and diving, playing water tag. Flora looked out over the bay at the white clouds piled in the pattern of an old world in the blue sky. Then the strong sun warmed her neck and she held her hand over it. The bright sunlight glinted on the wave tips in the blue water. Her neck still tingled from the heat and she got up, walking back carefully along the pier.

On the way home she passed the shipyard employment office and saw Pete Hastings talking to the man at the wicket. He waved his hand and caught up to her before she got to the street.

"Say, Flora, they're just telling me they'll be getting a boat in the dry dock soon."

"They're foolin' you."

"No, go on back and ask him yourself if you don't believe it."

"But what's it to you, Pete? You don't want work, surely?"

"I wouldn't mind it for a week, just for a change," he said good-humoredly.

They walked along the street together. He had no coat on and his dark-blue shirt wasn't very clean. He had on a wide belt and very thick boots, and his pants were all frayed at the cuffs. His face and neck were tanned and clean.

"How's Bill, the bright boy?" he asked genially.

"Oh, forget your teasin', Pete Hastings," she giggled.

They had an easy, unimportant conversation that lasted most of the way home; then, for a few moments, he walked beside her saying nothing. Finally he suggested that they take a walk some afternoon down along the bay by the vines where the kids played tree tag. She patted his arm and said it would be all right with her; then, when he turned away and left her, wondered why she had tolerated the suggestion and why she hadn't been angry when he called Bill a "bright boy." Standing on the sidewalk,

watching Pete's strong legs moving farther away, she urged herself to run after him, pound him on the back till he turned around abruptly; then, with her hands on her hips, or snapping her fingers under his nose, explain to him that he was merely a lump of clay compared with Bill. But she shrugged her shoulders and walked on home.

After supper, when she was wondering if she ought to tell Bill that she had gone for a walk with Pete, he asked soberly if she had ever thought seriously of going to church.

"We never go to church, Bill; you know that."

"I know it, and I'm not suggesting we ought to, either; only the thought of it fits in nicely with my work." He said that he could hardly relate his scientific summaries to religion if he did not understand the religious feeling. He was tired and really worried.

"Oh, I don't know, Bill; I don't know."

He wasn't as clean and neat as he had been. She was eager to say that he should not work that evening, but should go to bed early. He would drop the corners of his mouth, frown sullenly, and say nothing the rest of the evening. The talk of religion disturbed her, because usually he was confident and sure of himself. Now he was groping toward an idea that eluded him, feeling his way along an unfamiliar path.

"The trouble is," he said, "it isn't a feeling you can get by approaching the matter scientifically. It evidently had to get you unexpectedly, so I don't know how to go about it." He smiled, assuring her it was merely a simple inquiry for him, but she knew, suddenly, that in the last month he had gone far beyond her. He was sitting beside her, talking,—a tall, thin man with red eyelids and three cuts under his chin from shaving,—and he seemed so bewildered she wanted to cry.

"Let's go to a show to-night," she said.

"The show would hurt my eyes, Flora."

"Then let's go down to the Greek's and have some ice-cream and listen to the nickelodeon."

"It's quite an old machine," he grinned cheerfully.

"We should worry; maybe he's got some new pieces."

So she washed and dried the dishes and they went down-street to the ice-cream parlor. The Greek did a splendid business in the summer months. The walls of the long parlor were blue, with many large, bright paintings of nymphs and fauns, garlands of flowers encircling each painting. The nickelodeon was at the back, and young fellows took turns putting in nickels. One of the Greeks with a white apron and hairy arms took the order for two butter-scotch sundaes. Bill was at first interested in the sounds from the nickelodeon; then, restively, he asked Flora if she were enjoying herself. He had finished his sundae and sat at the table, his knees crossed, not listening to anything she said. A loud laugh and some giggles came from a group of fellows gathered around the nickelodeon. Two of them had hold of big Artie McGuin, a dark, clumsy fellow who blinked his eyes, and who hadn't been right wise since birth. Artie laughed awkwardly but good-naturedly and shook off the two fellows, and a Greek came from the soda-fountain at the front of the store and made them all sit down at the tables. Bill stared resentfully at the boys who had been teasing Artie. He smiled politely when Mrs. Milligan and her daughter, on their way out, stood at the table and Mrs. Milligan invited them to come over some night and have a game of croquet on the lawn. Bill thanked her genially, but when she had gone he was silent and uninterested again. Flora became embarrassed, sure that young people, passing, stared at them, and finally suggested that they go home.

They got as far as the Catholic church on the corner, two blocks below Main Street, just before the railway-crossing. Bill stopped under the chestnut-tree at the corner. The church lawn was well kept, a low iron fence following the margin from the church door alongside the walk to

the cinder driveway at the rear of the church.

"Would you mind waiting here a few minutes, Flora?" he said.

"Where are you going?"

"Just going to take a look in the church."

"Man alive, what's ailing you?"

"Nothing. I just want to be in there when it's dark and quiet. I kinda think I ought to have a talk with a priest. Wait here a minute, Flora."

He walked toward the church steps. She watched him hesitate at the top step, come down, and walk across the lawn to the presbytery. He stood on the lawn, looking in the lighted window of the front room. Finally he turned, went up the church steps again, and into the church.

She waited under the chestnut-tree. A buggy and an old horse came down the street. Some one was talking on Ingram's veranda across the road, and she tried to make out the words but could hear only voices. She walked out of the shadow of the tree and paced up and down in front of the church steps. Once she stood opposite the lighted window of the priest's house, wondering what Bill had seen in the room. She saw Marjorie Stevens, Father Stacey's housekeeper, come into the room, stand at the window, and then turn out the light. Marjorie was a slim pretty woman of thirty-five, aloof and dignified, who had gone to the city five years ago and had got married, and no one ever knew what had happened to her husband. Many people tried to be friendly with her and start interesting conversations, but she remained aloof and dignified. Flora suddenly felt angry at Bill. "He's behavin' like a nut—a juicy nut. What does a smart fellow like Bill want with monkeyin' around like this?"

Then he waved to her from the church step, came down lightly, two steps at a time, in good humor. Sullenly she walked beside him. Twice he spoke to her and she did not answer, so he shrugged his shoulders and began to whistle. On the old bridge opposite Starr's house she felt she must

talk at once, for she was angry and very curious, and wanted him to see that she was angry before discovering that she was curious. "You're a fine one!" she said. He kept on whistling. "You're a fine one!" She took hold of his arm, asking mildly what he had done in the church.

"Nothing whatever," he said. "Absolutely nothing. Just sat in the dark and twiddled my fingers. There's a red light up over the altar. I rather liked looking at it." He had looked in the window of the house, thinking he might see the priest. If he had seen him he would probably have gone in and had a talk with him.

A week later, the end of August, Flora had a long talk with old Mrs. Lawson. She had become uneasy about Bill in her own mind, and now regarded him as a stranger, who worked too hard in the evenings and couldn't sleep at night and went for long walks. Sometimes he went for a walk down on the pier, he said, or once or twice for a swim in the moonlight. Flora was sure that he had reached a point in his work where he had become confused and discouraged. At first she had seen only books on geology in the sewing-room, but recently he had brought home two books on paleontology and three short thin ones about chemistry. One night he was feeling good and explained to her that chemistry was the perfect illustration of form in the material world, a truth that he had grasped very quickly, and soon he would be able to demonstrate that all of life, scientifically speaking, could be regarded as a beautiful chemical formula. He was very much in earnest and told her he had decided to have a long talk with a priest about becoming a Catholic, because it was the next logical step to take in his work. Flora believed that he did have a talk with Father Stacey, for he explained, two days later, that he was happy to find that he could lead a normal blameless life with a little effort and a careful examination of his conscience. Flora said to her mother-in-law that Bill had become far too scrupulous; living had become too complicated for him, and it was a nuisance having him worry

whether his thoughts were in order and his life as worthy as his work.

His mother said: "Willie's probably making a great fool of himself. But he always did get impressions easy, and I'll give him a good talking to. Anyway, his father was a good Anglican. Why should he fool around with any other church?"

Flora went home to have an afternoon sleep, but couldn't close her eyes. Before lying down she had looked at herself in the mirror, realizing that Bill hadn't put his arms around her for a month. The diet he had recommended had taken some fat off her shoulders. She was a young woman and rather good-looking, and no one had put his arms around her for a long time. It was a hot afternoon. She began to breathe heavily, imagining her clothes were stifling her. She wiped sweat from her forehead. Trembling, she took off her blouse and put the palm of her hand on her shoulder; then sat down quickly, kicked off her shoes, and pulled off her stockings, laughing weakly. She walked over to the window and discovered a space between the wire screen and the sash. "That's where the mosquitoes have been getting in, I bet," she thought, and decided to take a fly-swatter, and, in the next few minutes, kill all the flies that were up-stairs. So she got dressed slowly, got the fly-swatter in the kitchen, and moved around aimlessly up-stairs, occasionally killing flies. She was alone with her thoughts and was restless.

On Friday afternoon she went for a walk with Pete Hastings. They walked down by the lake, far past the blue drop near the blockhouse, and beyond the vines where the kids played tree tag. Once they sat down for a long time. He put his arms around her. She became so nervous and hesitant, and got up so quickly, that he teased her the rest of the afternoon. She hadn't felt so uncertain of herself since she had got married, and had often thought that a married woman would not get excited easily when a man put his arm around her.

On Friday at 4 p.m. Bill came home from work and sat on the front veranda before coming into the house. Flora, working in the kitchen, watched him through the screen door sit down slowly in the rocking-chair. She went on getting supper and called him when she had poured tea.

At one time he had been fond of combination salad; to-night he stared at the plate, unable to understand why it had been placed before him.

"What's the matter, Bill?"

"Nothing. Do I look like something was the matter?"

"You look like you been thinking a good deal."

"Well, I have in way; I quit my job."

"You silly, silly, silly man. No! You're just having some fun with me."

"It's not funny. Does it sound funny?"

"It doesn't even sound funny."

"That's the way it should be."

"You mean you quit your job on the paper?"

"Yeah, I know it sounds bad, Flora, but I've quit my job on the paper. I felt I ought to do it and I did it. A man shouldn't go on doing a thing when he feels like that about it."

She said jerkily: "What did Johnny Williams say?"

"He said it was too bad and was ridiculous enough to suggest I might change my mind in a week or two. Johnny doesn't get the point, and, God help me, Flora, looking at you and that expression on your face, I'd say you don't get the point."

"I haven't got any expression on my face."

"You have an expression on your face."

"Honest, I haven't."

"Stop your lips moving. Now stop it, do you hear? Stop crying. Here. Here, take my handkerchief. Go on

now, eat your supper, and I'll talk to you about it."

"Awright, Bill."

"No, I won't start till you eat something. Dip your fork in the salad. Now move your jaws up and down. Take a cup of tea."

He leaned back in the chair, linking his hands behind his head. He scratched his head slowly, letting his wrists come down gradually till they pressed against his eyes.

"You're with me, aren't you, Flora?"

"Ain't I always with you, Bill?"

"That's right, only this is a little different. A long time now working on the paper's been botherin' me. Even on a small paper like this one there's an awful lot of bunk tossed around, lies and suggestions, so a man can no longer be scrupulous. I don't mean old Johnny isn't all right. But he looks at it differently. Maybe I've got so I'm too scrupulous. I donno about that, only it got to bothering my thoughts, I tell you. I can't go on working and worryin' over whether everything I'm doing's right or wrong. And it's not right. Say, how often in a day are you right? How often, afterward when you examine your conscience, are you wrong?"

"Please tell me, Bill," she said timidly. "What do you mean about your conscience?"

"Oh, that's simple, Flora. It's an old custom in the Catholic Church and it's too bad it went out of fashion with so many people. Sometimes a priest in a school would sit in front of a class and examine his own conscience and really be examining everybody's conscience. But you don't need that. A man can walk along the street and examine his conscience just as well."

"Who told you all that?"

"I just picked it up somewhere."

"Please don't talk any more about it, Bill."

"Why?"

"It just don't sound good, walking along the street doin' that."

"I was just explaining why I quit my job."

"And now, while you're at it, would you explain how we're going to live?"

"I'll do something else."

"Not in this town, you idiot."

Getting up, he looked at her carefully. She glared at him, hoping he would get angry, but he merely stood there, regarding her indifferently, and she groped for words that might enrage him. If he would become violently angry and beat the table with his hands or strike her violently on the face, she knew she would like it. He pushed back the chair and walked out of the kitchen.

He went up-stairs. She heard him walking into the sewing-room. A chair scraped, and he was sitting down. Then the white table-cloth, freshly creased and really a Sunday one her mother had given her last Christmas, attracted her attention. With the handle of a fork she made lines on the table-cloth, then stood up quickly and yelled up-stairs: "Bill, oh, Bill, you haven't eaten any supper." He did not answer. "Honest, Bill, I wasn't tryin' to get you sore."

For three minutes she waited at the foot of the stairs, feeling miserable because he had looked thin and half-starved. Then, in the front room, she lay down and felt surprisingly tired. Something should occur to her, a speech so impressive she could go up-stairs and talk to Bill authoritatively. But she was afraid of what he might say. For the first time she realized that he was capable of terrifying her. The sofa was old, and thick black hair, protruding through the cover, pricked her till she shifted her body to a more comfortable position. Often Bill, lying on the sofa, would be tickled by one of the hairs and jump up complaining that the sofa ought to have been thrown out years ago, though when she suggested getting a new sofa he had objected bitterly. She longed for old days when he was happy in the evenings. To-night, after supper, he should have gone into the front room to lie

on the sofa while she did the dishes, two pillows behind his head, and make strange but satisfactory noises on his mouth-organ. Not for two months had he played a tune. Nothing he might do with books would be as pleasant for her as the noises he got from the mouth-organ, though often she had made him quit playing, the sound getting on her nerves.

She got up to go out to the back yard and look at the garden. Only a few white roses were on a single bush, but all July there were roses. It was poppy time. Bill, though not interested in flowers, occasionally noticed dark-red poppies. Neighbors had noticed the dark-red ones and asked for seeds, but always she carefully gave away seeds for pink or white poppies: it was no use everybody on the street having a yardful of the same fine red ones.

Watering the rose-bushes with a small green watering-can, she felt that she was no longer in her own home. She watered all the flowers, then sat on a grocery-box on the lawn long after it got dark, thinking of having many fine friends. Bill had grown aloof from her and stubbornly she told herself she would never again suggest that he make love to her, as she had done the night before. Her legs were cramped, sitting on the grocery-box, and she felt more restless than ever before. Her hand, patting the side of the box, touched the grass, and the dew felt good. She ran her fingers lightly along the surface of the grass, then touched her forehead with the moist tips. Three times she did it and her forehead felt cool. The yard was shadowed by the house and a light was in Mrs. Fulton's kitchen window next door. A dog howled down the street, and in front of the house she heard Mike barking eagerly, the bark moving farther away as he trotted down the cinder path. Letting her breath out slowly, she got up, stretched her back, and walked around the alleyway to the front gate, to go over to Dolly Knox's house.

Next morning, talking to Bill, she mentioned Pete

Hastings's name four times, to worry him; but it never occurred to him that there was a personal implication, since he found Pete uninteresting and was astonished whenever any one took him seriously.

He was staying home all day. In the morning he got up at nine o'clock, had two slices of whole-wheat bread and an orange, and went up-stairs to work for three hours. Always at noon hour he seemed tired and puzzled, and she imagined the work was getting very difficult. One afternoon he came downstairs at three o'clock and complained of light spots floating in front of his eyes. She suggested that he rest a few days. He shook his head, went on working, and next day had a very bad headache. He drank two cups of hot water and went out for a walk, without eating any breakfast. At noontime he did not come back and she was so worried she could not eat anything. Later on in the afternoon he returned and said he had forgotten all about the time, and had just kept on walking around the town.

His hair was uncombed and his shirt open at the throat. He hadn't shaved all week, and his hands were dirty. She talked bitterly about his carelessness and his shirts, and one boot laced only halfway up, and said that soon he would be walking around the town in his bare feet. He answered mildly that there was no reason why he shouldn't wear a tie and, fingering his chin, said that he might just as well shave, only he had forgotten about it. She told him angrily to get his own dinner.

She walked over to his mother's place and they had a long talk about Bill. The old woman offered to talk to him at once, and on the way over Flora insisted he would come to a bad end. He was sitting in the kitchen, at the table, a knife and a fork and a plate in front of him.

His mother put her hand on his shoulder and told him he was starving himself and was a fool not to eat.

"Of course I'll eat," he said.

"Go ahead, cook a steak, Flora," his mother said.

"I'll eat till I'm full," he said. "That's all you can expect of anybody."

But next day he ate very little and she avoided him in the house. She avoided him but really watched him carefully, hoping he would notice that she was no longer interested in him and discovered that he was no longer aware of her. She wanted to hurt him and sneered at him. She put food on the table at supper-time and turned her back on him to read the papers from the city. In the evening she went down-town by herself and met Pete Hastings and allowed him to bring her home. He was such a gentleman that they walked very slowly, and they stepped off the road into a shadow under a big tree and he kissed her eagerly. A nighthawk swooped by screeching, and she trembled and put her arm tightly around Pete. They walked slowly from the tree, saying nothing important but talking happily. Before they got to the corner she left him, promising that he could see her in the house some night when Bill was out for the evening.

Bill continued taking the long walks in the evening. Usually he went alone, though Mike, the fox-terrier, followed sometimes. Once Bill came home and shut the door before Mike got in. The dog scratched at the door and howled, and Bill asked Flora where it had been all evening. Another time he was going down the front path at twilight, Mike tagging at his heels, and he turned, kicking out viciously, catching the dog on the lower jaw. Mike yelped and ran back to the house, and never followed Bill again.

Flora had been down-town shopping and was walking along the cinder path with Mrs. McGuin when she heard the dog squealing. She was sure Bill was beating Mike. Mrs. McGuin was prepared to stand at the gate for a long chat, but Flora left her and hurried into the house.

Bill was sitting on a chair in the kitchen, bending forward, staring intently at the dog crawling toward him on its belly. The dog was very scared and she watched

its tail. She did not speak; she stood rigidly in the hall. Bill tapped the dog gently on the head; its tail wagged slightly, its eyes on Bill's face.

"Have you been beating that dog?" Flora said suddenly.

He looked up pleasantly and said: "Of course I haven't, Flora. Keep your shirt on." Then he went on staring at the dog.

"Well, I think you're a bit loony, do you hear?"

"Loony! I should say not."

"Well, don't hit that dog again. Some one needs to give you a good whack for what ails you."

He laughed easily and stroked the dog's back. Mike got up uncertainly, turning his head to Flora and watching Bill alertly. Flora looked around the room and then at Bill and the dog, and doubtfully went up-stairs to change her dress. Bill picked up Mike and sat near the back window.

She had taken off her dress and put on a skirt and was holding a blouse in her hand while she tightened the string at the neck of her shirt when she heard Mike yelp twice. Scared, she hurried down-stairs. The dog yelped again when she was at the kitchen door. Bill, the dog in his arms, was looking out the window, the fingers of his right hand stroking Mike's ear. Absent-mindedly he twisted the ear, without turning his head from the window. The dog squirmed, but Bill held it and stroked the ear again. Flora snatched the dog from his arms and slapped him across the face.

"You great big bully! You great big fool!" she said.

Rubbing his face, he got up. She expected him to grab hold of her savagely and shake her till she cried out and she stood in front of him, breathing jerkily and waited. He said awkwardly: "Haven't you got more sense than to do a thing like that?"

She began to cry and turned away and left the kitchen. In the front room she sat on the sofa, the dog still under her arm. Still crying, she stroked the fur on the dog's back, talking nonsense to it.

Then she pushed the dog away from her and yelled out suddenly: "I'm going to go away. I'm going to go up to the farm to my own people. I'm not going to hang around here with a loon like you."

From the kitchen he answered quietly: "Now don't be silly, Flora."

She sat alone in the front room and made a plan for seeing a doctor. The dog went to sleep at her feet. Bill might be very sick from not eating, but if she went to see a doctor about him all the neighbors would talk. "I guess they're talking anyway," she thought. Some one in the town ought to be able to persuade him to take a long rest and eat hearty meals.

6

The first week in September she saw Pete three times. The meetings were casual and unimportant, though they talked intimately and he suggested he should come and see her some night when Bill was away. To herself she admitted that she didn't love Bill now, but hesitated to be too generous with Pete; and always, after thinking of it, was angry at herself for being afraid of her own thoughts, because she knew she wanted Pete to make love to her. Talking to Pete so intimately made her feel embarrassed and afraid, and disgusted with herself for not encouraging him.

A boat was in the dry dock and many men in the town got work. Flora had to take money out of the bank for daily expenses. Mrs. Fulton was in good humor; her husband made so much money as a riveter. Flora had a rose-bush that bloomed late; two white roses were full-blown and there were three buds.

The night Pete was to come into the house she talked agreeably to Bill, anxious to find out where he was going and if he would be home early. Words came easily to her,

though she felt that his face had become pinched and ugly. He didn't know where he was going, or when he would return, and thought it was unimportant anyway.

She drew down the window-shade as soon as he left the house. The window of the front room faced the open field across the road. When it got dark Pete would stand somewhere in the field, watching the front window, waiting till she lowered the shade. The light was not lit at the corner, but it was almost dark in the house; so she lit a lamp, placed it on a small table by the window, and sat down on the sofa. Every small sound outside the house aroused her and her heart beat heavily. Her hands got very cold suddenly and she rubbed the palms together rapidly, then held them tightly between her legs. Twice she got up and peeked out the window, astonished that it was getting dark so slowly. The first time she lifted the shade she could see across the field to the tracks, but the second time a shadow obscured the farthest margin. Down the road a girl was trying to yodel and farther away another girl's voice yoo-hooed an answer.

She felt that he would not come and was at first glad and then indignant. Some one tapped lightly on the front door and she could hardly get her breath. Again he tapped and she decided to open the door two or three inches and tell him hurriedly to go away at once; and tiptoeing in the hall she opened the door, but he came in before she could think of anything to say. They stood in the hall and he kissed her quickly and she whispered: "Don't, Pete. You got to stop." He laughed too loudly and she said, "Sh, sh, sh, sh"; so he said: "Well, we can't stand here."

"Come on in the kitchen."

His heavy boots squeaked, walking along the hall. The third squeak terrified her.

"You better sit down quick, Pete."

He sat on the kitchen chair at the end of the table.

"Are we just going to stay here?" he asked, disappointed.

"Aw, come on. Come on a little closer. Say, what's the matter? I'm not going to bite you. Oh, well, suit yourself, but sit on my knee at least. Don't stand there leaning against the table."

"Maybe it would be better after all to go into the front room to the sofa," she said, pleased to have thought of something to do immediately. "Only you'd better take off your boots."

He grinned, bending down. "That'll be real home-like." His fingers worked at knots in the laces. His fingers were thick and strong. Bill never had trouble with laces, because he tied bow-knots. He had one shoe off when she said suddenly: "Kiss me, Pete."

"Sure I will," he said, without straightening up. "But now I got the boots off, I'll tie the laces together so if I have to go quick I can just link them over my arm." He stood up to kiss her, and she noticed a small hole in the heel of his sock. He kissed roughly till she couldn't hold her breath any longer and felt weak. She had become helpless so easy that she tried to conceal it from him and led the way into the front room, walking slowly and evenly on her tiptoes, without looking back, as though concentrating on surprising some one in the front room.

They sat down awkwardly on the sofa and he took her face in his hands and kissed her. She held on to him and he kept kissing her till she no longer cared what happened. All the time he talked quietly and confidently. "You don't want to stick around here, Flora; let you and me get out of here."

"There's no place to go."

"Sure, there's all kinds of places. I'd like to go up the lakes fishin,' sleepin' most of the time. It's great when you get used to it. It's great in the early morning when it's cool and only a little sun. That's when you feel good."

"I'll come, Pete."

"I knew you would, kiddo."

"I'll come; it'll be great in the early morning."

"There's nothin' at all for a lively kid like you around here."

"I know it, I know it. But don't let's talk any more, Pete; not right now."

She closed her eyes, relaxing her whole body. Her eyes opened abruptly. She heard a footstep on the veranda. Then she heard the front door moving on the hinges. She thought of jumping up, but could not move her arms or legs. Pete stood up, his head moving twice in a half-circle, and then Bill came into the room. He stood at the door, blinking his eyes, rubbing his bearded cheek with his left hand.

"Hello, Flora," he said.

"Hello, Bill."

Still leaning against the door-post he said mildly: "I don't like this guy, Flora. I never did."

His lips seemed to hurt when he smiled, and he moistened them. He had no collar on and had not shaved for five days. Short black hair on his face made his lips appear redder. The hair on his cheek bothered him and he kept rubbing it with his left hand. Then he saw Pete's boots on the carpet, the laces tied together. Pete, who had been staring at him, scratched his head clumsily and slowly bent down to pick them up. Grinning, Bill pointed at Pete's stockinged feet, then jerked his head back. His head jerked back three times, but always looking at Flora. She was bewildered and could not speak. Bill spun round sharply and ran along the hall and out the front door. His feet only touched the steps once, and she heard him running down the path.

In her mind she could still hear him running when she said to Pete: "You better go home."

"Maybe I'd better," he said uneasily.

"Hurry, Pete, go on home."

"Well, I got to put my boots on."

"No, go on, hurry."

He hung the boots over his arm. At the front door he

said lamely: "Listen, Flora, listen; I meant it about the fishin' trip."

"Hurry, Pete; please hurry."

She put both hands on his shoulder, pushed him, and closed the front door. In the kitchen she sat down, leaning on the table, and had no thoughts, just a heavy, uneasy feeling making it hard for her to find a comfortable position. A noise in the back yard frightened her and she got up quickly to open the back door. Three cats ran along the fence. She sat down again expecting to have many thoughts and ready to cry, but no thoughts came to her and she couldn't cry. Suddenly she became so frightened she hardly dared breathe. She had been waiting for Bill to come back, and, moaning softly, she felt now that he wouldn't come back. "He's apt to do something the way he's feeling and running around," she thought. "He's apt to hurt himself, or do any old thing."

Quickly she got up and half-stumbled into the front room and looked around vaguely, and mechanically blew out the light. Alone in the dark she felt better, hidden from uneasy thoughts, and in the chair she rocked back and forth, a board squeaking regularly, the noise gradually holding all of her attention, the squeak louder every time, she thought. Rocking slower, she hoped to get over the board unexpectedly, but the creak abruptly startled her. "If I hear that squeak again, I'll go crazy," she thought, but wouldn't get up. It was time for her to become serious and think clearly. As soon as she attempted to organize her thoughts she jumped up muttering: "I'm not going to stay in here; that's one thing I'm not going to do."

Her legs felt stronger going into the kitchen. She blew out the kitchen lamp. In the hall she took her spring coat from the rack, fumbling with a button on the sleeve with one hand while she opened the front door. A light breeze had come up, blowing from the bay, and her forehead, sweating, got cold. The breeze carried the smell of fresh paint and she tried to remember which one of the neigh-

bors was painting his house, and slowly walked to the gate and turned along the cinder path, heading for Bill's mother's place, because that was where he would go if intending to stay away all night. She began to walk rapidly with a short, quick stride, the coat hanging over her right arm. Once she looked back at the house and across the field at the station lights. Her heels crunched in the cinders. At the corner, near the light, she hesitated, then began to run, her coat hanging loosely over her arm, flapping against her leg, and she wondered why she was carrying it.

Old Mrs. Lawson lived on the other side of the town. Flora turned south as far as the old rough-cast house with the broken windows and tall weeds all round it. A short cut was a path across a field behind the rough-cast house. The field was used for cow-pasturage, and wagon-wheels had marked a path. A clump of cedars at the edge of the field behind the house was a tall dark shadow, and nervously she decided to avoid the path and go the longer way around the corner.

No one was in sight on the street and she was glad. The moon was full—it was about eleven o'clock. She hurried past the rough-cast house, because no one had lived there for years and the windows were dark blotches in the moonlight. A negro family had once quarrelled in the house and everybody knew the story. The moon shone on the walls and the roof looked very black. A cement sidewalk ran from the corner up the slope of the hill and her footfalls sounded so loud on it she started to run.

At the top of the slope she saw the frame cottage with no lights in it, close to the edge of the sidewalk, and no veranda. She rapped on the door and heard no sound and knew Bill had not been there. Again she rapped loudly and some one moved in the front bedroom with the window, open six inches, facing the street.

The old lady's voice said: "Who's there?"

"It's me, Flora."

"It's a funny time of night. Is something the matter?"

"It's about Bill."

"Just a minute."

A match-flame wavered. Through the window she saw the old woman bending over the dresser, one hand holding the lamp-shade. The lamplight was dim, but she turned up the wick and came to the door in her nightgown.

"I just wanted to know if Bill came here."

"Came here when?"

"About half an hour ago."

"Then he didn't stir me out of my bed if he did. Why in the name of misery would he come here?"

The lamp smoked in the breeze. The shade got dark at the top, so the old woman said they had better sit in the front room. When they were sitting down the old lady, tapping her chest with the tips of her fingers said bluntly: "Now, what's the matter?"

"I don't know. He ran out of the house a half an hour ago. He was acting funny. He was acting funny before, but this time something was botherin' him."

"I don't know what's got into him. Somethin's got into him and it's taking his heart and his head away."

"He's been worryin' me."

"And he's been worryin' me."

Flora imagined the old woman was peering at her and became uncomfortable. "You ought to put a shawl around you." she said.

"What happened to-night that bothered you so?"

"I'm just afeared of him."

"Afeared of Bill?"

"I just said I was afeared of him. But I thought he was here and I must be going."

She got up and went out, not hearing what the old woman said to her. On the sidewalk she looked up and down the street and began to walk rapidly, the coat on her

arm swinging with her stride. Halfway down the slope she started to run, and took the short cut across the field behind the old rough-cast house.

7

Half-way across the field, close to the cedars, she stumbled, her heel caught in a hole from a cow's hoof. She was on her knees in the grass and aware of shadows, trees, and the field. Calmly, without getting up, she looked around carefully. Night noises from the trees did not frighten her. She was looking for Bill, and he might have come across this path, or be lying down underneath a tree; so she got up and moved forward cautiously, peering underneath trees on the fringe of the bush. A twig cracked; she turned abruptly, listening; "Oh, Bill," she called softly, but there was no sound. Farther back in the bush another twig cracked, and timidly she walked away from the trees and stood uncertainly on the wagon-track. Accustomed to the darkness, she made out a fence, cow-dung on the path, and a few yards away the back door hanging by one hinge on the old house. Trees and shadows did not worry her but she backed away from the house, moving backward slowly, certain at each step that Bill was in the old house. Suddenly she stood still and looked up at the clear stars, and, clinching her fists, walked determinedly toward the house. At the back steps, tipped away from the door, her legs would not move forward; her thoughts got mixed up. She called out softly, so her voice would carry into the house: "Oh Bill; it's me, Flora." The sound of her voice made her lonely and she put one hand over her eyes so she wouldn't see the house; then began to run across the field toward the street. She found thoughts as her feet went down steadily on firm ground. "Even if he went in the old house I ought to look every place else first." On the street again she became calmer, slowing down to a

walk, and decided to go to the station. He might be dozing in the waiting-room, or even waiting for a train. Far away she heard the hooting of an engine whistle and knew that if Bill were at the station, waiting for the train, it would be there in a few minutes. She ran, her mouth open, trying to suck in long breaths of air. She was almost opposite her own house; no lights in the windows, no lights in any house along the street; all the town was quiet; no leaves moved. On the path in the field by the water-tower she looked back and was glad no lights were in the houses, for the moonlight alone was better for her thoughts. Every object was distinct. The rushes near the small pond skirted by the path swayed, and crickets made the same noises she heard every night, sitting on the veranda. The surface of the tracks shone in the moonlight. Carefully lifting her feet, she crossed the tracks to the platform. She heard the telegrapher ticking at his instruments, but no one was on the platform. Timidly she walked toward the waiting-room, tiptoeing on the platform, two trucks between her and the telegrapher's window. Her hand, on the knob of the waiting-room door, trembled as she pushed gently, holding her breath, peeking in gradually as more of the room was revealed. Just the shiny benches around the room, cigarette-butts near the end of the bench, the cold stove in the centre of the floor. She tossed her coat on the bench and bent down over the cigarette-butts. Bill often smoked cigarettes, and she thought she might remember the odor, and picked up a butt, sniffing cautiously, but could recognize only a tobacco odor. She picked up three butts but they all smelled alike, and one had a cork tip, and she had never seen him smoking cork-tipped cigarettes. Her legs began to feel tired and she sat down holding her lower lip with her teeth so it wouldn't tremble.

The engine whistle sounded much louder, coming around the bend. Eagerly she got up and stood at the waiting-room door, where she could see along the platform. No

one on the platform. The headlight on the engine swung around the bend, the bell clanging, the light getting larger and more dazzling till it was directly upon her, then gone completely beyond her, the bell still clanging, the light on the last coach getting very small as the whistle sounded mournfully a last time. Puzzled she stepped out to the platform, sure there had been some mistake, and standing there became very indignant and angry that the train hadn't stopped. She walked along to the telegraph office and peered at the man through the open windows. He was in his shirt-sleeves, a green shade over his eyes, the string on the shade making his hair at the front stand on end.

"The train didn't stop," she said abruptly.

He looked up quickly and said: "It never does."

"It should have stopped. I was sure it was going to stop."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't want to go any place, but I expected the train to stop."

"Sorry; that one never stops. Won't be one that stops for three hours." He looked at her curiously and bending over his instruments added sarcastically: "Come around in the morning; a lot of them stop then."

She put her hands on her hips, ready to answer him sharply, but became confused and walked back to the waiting-room and picked up her coat. She sat on the bench, her head hanging to one side, the knot of hair at the back of her neck becoming untidy. Idly she laid the coat across her knees, stroking the cloth with the palm of her hand and couldn't think of anything. She caressed the cloth. Her stockings and underwear felt damp from perspiration.

She muttered: "I been a bad, bad woman." The room was so quiet she could hear faintly the click of the telegraph-instruments. She had been thinking only of finding Bill, but knew of no place to look and found it easier

at the moment to think of herself. He had needed attention, and she had let things get to a point where she had laughed at him, and had got so mean she couldn't stand him touching her. Now she knew if she could only find him she could make a simple explanation and they both would be very happy. Listening eagerly, she got up, still believing everything would be all right once she found Bill. And everything that she might have done would be forgiven if she could talk to him. He had gone away and was hiding from her but if she found him before he talked to any one else he would go home with her.

Slowly she walked away from the station toward the shipyard. The road from the station curves up to Pine Street and Pine runs down to the dock. The yard beams were dark across the sky. The steady wash of waves against the dock and along the beach she heard before she got to the pier. All along the shore for miles the waves broke and lapped the sand. The wash of waves was too monotonous a sound and she put her hands over her ears. A light was in the timekeeper's office; the night watchman, Mr. Gilchrist, would be there, but she was afraid to question him, because she knew him, and he would tell his wife she had been wandering around the docks at midnight looking for her husband. In the shadow of the fence she stopped, looking out along the pier past the tall elevator, all the way out to the end, and beyond to the stars in the sky. "I don't need to go out there," she thought. "I could see him from here, if he was out there." Sometimes he walked late at night out to the end of the pier and sat there listening to the lapping water, having his own fine thoughts. Leaning against the fence, she was certain he wasn't out there to-night, so she rested, finding words and making sentences to use when she found him, sentences that would never hold Pete's name, for Bill would understand, by the way she held him, he was the only man in the world who could ever interest her.

She heard some one moving in the yard on the other

side of the fence and, frightened, moved away, taking short, rapid steps. No longer could she pretend she was talking to Bill, as she hurried, aimlessly going along the streets, stopping whenever she heard a football. She met no one. She was tired, but determined not to go back to the house.

As far west as the Catholic church she remembered she ought to be avoiding Bill, for she was afraid of him and had forgotten how he had been acting the last month. On her father's farm she would be much happier. Main Street was around the curve, and brighter lights. The road crossed Main Street and went north far beyond the town limits to the rural routes and her father's place, three hours' walk away.

After walking aimlessly she was glad she had thought of some place to go. Beyond Main Street, and walking slower, she was no longer tired.

Some good houses were in this section of the town, new brick houses with well-kept lawns. Farther on, where two streets crossed, was a new cement bridge over the gutter. She sat on the bridge to rest her feet. The street was dark and quiet, but the moon shone on the cement bridge. She rested peacefully a moment, then took off her shoes, rubbing the soles of her feet, looking back furtively along the road. Some one might be following her, and she would have to turn back and go home. The soles of her feet were stiff, but no longer ached, and she walked with an easier stride. Houses along the road were fewer now and smaller. The fields were bigger and in patches of light in the shadow she saw the shapes of cows stretched out on the grass. Some cows stood motionless in the field. The last house was at the beginning of the dirt road. She walked on the footpath close to a barbed-wire fence.

Away from the town it was much lighter; the sky seemed clearer, and the air warmer. The September moon was large and round, and she saw farmhouses back a

way from the road. Stooping, she brushed her hand in the cool, moist grass. A dog howled near a farmhouse. She was not frightened. Walking steadily in the dark on the footpath, she began to sympathize with herself, for she hardly believed that Pete had been in the house or that Bill had gone running away. She sympathized with her life of the last few months, and knew she might have left him long ago, for only a good but foolish woman would have put up with him so long.

Her thoughts remained clear, though her legs got very tired after walking an hour and a half. For a few minutes she sat down on a flat rock near the path. Her hips ached when she moved, and her whole body was heavy. Her eyelids were heavy. Shaking her head to keep awake, she got up and went on walking, concentrating on moving her legs, steadily, evenly. But she stumbled and knew her eyes had closed while walking.

The road dipped down across a small stream and her eyes, accustomed to darkness, made out shapes of low, rounded hills covered with spruce-trees. The next mile would be through low hills and the clumps of bushes. Huge, smooth rocks were close to the road. Where the bushes grew close to the road were many stumps, small rocks, and shadows. She looked directly ahead, feeling that she was watching one stump out of the corner of her eye. In the moonlight the shadow seemed to move slowly; she stopped suddenly, peering at the stump, thinking it was a man humped down, or a bear; then began to run forward, her thoughts coming swiftly. Last spring Joe Boyle, driving his automobile down from his farm one night, had bumped into something, and it turned out that he had killed a bear. Bears hadn't been seen in this section of the country for years, though farther east, around the bay, and beyond Wiarton, a man had killed fourteen last winter. She stumbled on the path but kept on going, though hardly able to breathe. The country had flattened out, but ahead were fields on gentle slopes. There was

more moonlight. She walked slower, breathing easier.

She could go no farther. She had to lie down. The farm land now sloped upward. Over the zig-zag fence was a corn-field, and at the slope of a hill three jack-pines. The pines were too isolated on the curve of the hill, too gaunt against the sky-line, and she would have been uneasy, she knew, sleeping under them. She climbed the wooden fence, her skirt catching on a nail and holding, though she attempted to lift it carefully. She tugged until it tore loose.

A few feet away from the fence, between two rows of corn, she spread her coat. There had been no rain all week and the ground was not damp. Lying down slowly, she stretched her legs, waited, expecting to be frightened. Leaves of corn stirred and rustled, and she listened to small sounds, but was not scared. The corn was clean and friendly. The corn grew in back yards of many houses on the streets in the town. Her fingers reached out and held loosely to a stalk. Drowsily she realized that the night air was good and the smell of the corn-field fresh and pleasant. Heavy-eyed, she tried to look up at the stars and wished vaguely some one was with her to make love to her. Pete had wanted to go fishing up the lakes and sleep out-of-doors. They would fish in the stream farther east. Sometimes they might go up streams at night, fishing for suckers, Pete walking a few paces ahead of her, the suckers in the streams banging against her legs. But it was too late in the year for good suckers, she remembered. In the spring, when the water was colder, they were fresh and firm, but later on the water got warm and they got wormy and no good for eating. She would let Pete do the fishing for trout and follow him all day, cooking his meals and they would lie down together in the evenings, and hear the night-birds. The nights would be warm; she could stretch out with few clothes on.

A night-bird in the jack-pines screeched. She shivered a little and tried to find pleasant thoughts again before going to sleep. She opened her eyes a last time and saw

cornstalks, and moved her body slightly to one side, off a pebble, then went to sleep.

It was early when she woke up. The sun was low. Tips of white corn-cobs gleamed through green pods. Golden tassels brushed against her face as she got up on her knees and peered through the stalks at the road. She raised her head to look for the farmhouse, evidently on the other slope of the hill. Stiff and tired, she crawled toward the fence, not wanting to be seen. Standing up, to get over the fence, she discovered a bad pain in her hip. Strands of hair fell on her shoulder. She thought of going back to look for hairpins, but was anxious to get over the fence.

On the road she walked slowly, limping a little. The road reached the top of the slope and she looked far ahead at the hills, and farms on the slopes. To the left the hills farther away were very blue in the early morning, but hills ahead were tinted brown and green. Years ago her father, or the hired man, had driven her from high school in the buggy, and she had loved watching the blue hills losing their color as they got closer. The pain in her hip, as she walked, relaxed, her body lost its stiffness. A stream trickled under logs at the side of the road. She bent down to wash her face and hands, the water on her face refreshing her. When she knelt down first she had felt like crying; straightening up, she was prepared to go on walking, no longer sorry for herself. It was time to think of talking to her mother and father. Her father would be out in the fields. Her mother would talk very rapidly, worrying while asking questions.

The sun was half-way up when she reached the concession route leading to her father's farm. She swung open the long wooden gate and, though stiff, walked briskly all the way up to the house, since some one might be watching from the window.

She opened the kitchen door and her mother, preserving fruit, said: "Is that you, Flora; what made you

come in the morning?" Her mother was a small woman with a wiry body and tired, lined face. The kitchen smelt of stewed raspberries. Flora sat down and told her mother how Bill had been acting queerly, and how last night he had run out of the house and she had been scared to stay there alone.

8

Two days after her return to the farm her father drove into town to see Bill. Afterwards, he told Flora that he had been unable to find him and no one knew where he had gone. Her father believed, before going into town, that she had been foolish to leave her husband. When he came back he said it was the best she had left him; strange talk was in town about his behavior the last month.

In the early fall her father worked hard with the harvesting, and she helped her mother in the house. It was hard getting up so early in the morning. Her father and the hired man went out to the fields, when only light streaks of dawn were in the sky, and she fed the chickens. An hour later they had a heavy breakfast, too heavy for her, accustomed to a light meal at that hour. Later on the early-morning air exhilarated her; with a bowl of chicken-feed in her arm she stood, watching the light striking the hilltops, the valleys in shadow. The hills sloped gently, rounded and cultivated, but farther back the hills were higher, more rugged and wooded and blue in the morning. There were blue hills, farther back, only in the early morning. Her mother suggested that Flora should drive into town and do some shopping. Always she refused, surprising herself once by shuddering. Alone afterwards, she was slightly ashamed that she had shuddered, giving an impression that meeting Bill, or even walking in town, would be too terrifying. But in time she got to believe that shuddering expressed the proper attitude of a badly

abused woman. She had long talks with her mother, working together in the kitchen, and explained how Bill had sometimes shaken her and done other unbelievable and horrible things, till she had cried like a child. Her mother, a small, wiry woman, had always worked hard and had never had time to think of other women's husbands, so she encouraged Flora to talk, and they agreed that if she had remained with Bill another day life would have been unbearable.

For years she had known that her mother had peculiar faults, always secretive, evasive, telling white lies to her husband. After working with her for weeks Flora realized that her mother had always been afraid of her husband. He had forced her to become very guarded and careful in her way of living, and rarely gave her enough money for the house. He never gave her any spending-money. Eagerly she explained to Flora that she kept a few pigs herself, fattened them, sold them, and kept the money. She called it her "pig money" and had a hiding-place for it.

Very carefully Flora insisted that she could never live with Bill again, and when both her father and mother took it for granted, she felt she could afford to ask occasionally whether any one had heard of him since the night he went away.

Bill's mother came to the farm to have a talk with Flora. From the window Flora saw one of Jameson's livery cars coming up the lane, the old lady sitting alone in the back seat, wearing a black bonnet with a flash of red silk, and black ribbons knotted in a bow under her chin. The day was cloudy and cool and it looked like rain. The driver opened the door and helped her out. Flora stood on the side-porch steps, waiting.

Bill's mother said determinedly: "I'd like to have a talk, Flora. Not here, but in the house."

"Come on into the front room, Mrs. Lawson."

The man in the livery car took out his pipe and crossed his legs.

They sat down in two wide mahogany rocking-chairs on the thin, tan-colored carpet. "Where's Bill?" the old woman said quickly.

"I don't know; really, I don't; that is what I'd like to know."

"What was the matter between you, then?"

"Nothing; he ran away, and he was ill-treating me and acting funny, that's all."

"Bill never ill-treated anybody. There wasn't a bad bone in his body."

"I don't think you ought to contradict me."

"HMMMMMM. It's an odd thing his going away didn't worry you more."

"It did. It worried and worried me till I couldn't stand up straight."

"It didn't."

"I say he was ill-treating me and acting like he had a wind in his head, and the Lord knows what he's up to now."

The old lady sucked her lips, having trouble with her teeth. Her head was swaying; the lids of her eyes got red and moist. She whispered: "If you go traipsing around telling people Bill was bad to you and beat you, I'll wring your neck, you vixen." She leaned forward, her jaws moving up and down, and Flora tilted back in the chair, eager to answer her sharply. The old lady's eyes were bloodshot, her whole body trembled, and Flora suddenly felt scared and yelled, "Mother, come here," and leaned far back in the chair.

Her mother came into the room at once. Without asking a single question she said: "Now, now, Mrs. Lawson; that'll about do, won't it? That'll be about all from you." Bill's mother glared at her, raised her hands abruptly, and began to cry. Rocking back and forth, crying and mutter-

ing: "To think I'd ever live to see the day when anybody'd say my Bill had a wind in his head."

She never expected to see Bill again, she said. Flora's mother, talking quietly and gently, suggested many abuses Flora might have suffered, and hinted that if she remained with Bill she too might have been driven out of her mind. Mrs. Lawson, who was not interested in Flora, simply wanted to talk about Bill. Flora merely listened till it became embarrassing, sitting there saying nothing, and she left the room quietly. Bill's mother never called on them again.

The nights were long in October, and sometimes Flora wandered along the road long after it got dark. A declivity, a couchlike slope with dried grass, just back from the road, suggested to her a place where a girl might sit down with a lover. The hired man on her father's farm was leather-skinned and tired, much older than she, and not interested in women. She accompanied her father into town in the Ford, hoping to see Pete Hastings on the main street. The night before the drive she lay awake in bed, imagining herself sitting in the car on Main Street, her father in a store making some purchases. Pete would come walking lazily along the street, see her, saunter over. Before her father came out of the store they would have two minutes together and she could tell him about the quiet road near the farm after dark and the hollow in the slope with the dried grass. But the day they went into town it rained hard. In the morning the sky was clear, but at two o'clock in the afternoon, half-way to town, dark clouds passed over the sun, and it rained. She didn't see Pete.

She found an interest in a new way of living. Neighboring farm people, hearing her mother's stories of Bill's strange behavior, were sympathetic, treating her as a good woman who had suffered with fortitude. The Maloneys, on the next farm, who had been poor until two years ago, invited her to come over in the evening very often. No

one ever knew how they became prosperous so suddenly, and got the new barn, electric rods on all the buildings, and three fine horses. Mr. Maloney's wife had been dead for years and his housekeeper, a dark, thin woman with splendid legs, looked after him. Irene Maloney was Flora's age, and her sister Katie three years younger and much prettier. Irene talked eagerly to Flora about her father's hired man, who wanted her to go away and live in the city with him, but she was too lazy to leave the farm. She talked guardedly to Flora about Bill, hoping to surprise her into revealing something startling.

Flora believed now that she had really suffered, so every Sunday she drove in to the Anglican church with her father and mother. She wore black on Sundays and shook her head sadly when any one mentioned Bill's name. After church town people stood on the sidewalk under the trees and farmers got into their cars at once, to be home in time for dinner. Flora never gossiped, but she knew people were watching her sympathetically, a woman in black who was unhappy and had been close to a great tragedy. After church one Sunday she saw Dolly Knox on the street and her father stopped the car. Dolly talked very rapidly, and Flora, embarrassed, said she would go and see her some afternoon, but did not ask her to come up to the farm.

The days in November disturbed and saddened her, and she longed for good times and some one to make love to her. Bill was merely some one she had lived with a long time ago and had grown tired of. In the house she sat by herself, sewing, remodelling old dresses skilfully. Her father brought her a bouquet of autumn leaves in wild, rich colors and she told him that some day she would go back to town and do dressmaking for a living. October had been a fine month, and she had liked the green becoming brown, and the red leaves on the trees, but in November the red leaves were a crisp, dried-out tan that withered and were blown away. Leaves were blown across

the fields and over the hills and a wind carried them away in eddies. In the evenings, lying awake in bed, she heard dead leaves rustling on the ground and was unhappy. The trees were stark naked. In the evenings her mother and father read all the magazines subscription agents had sold them during the summer.

In the middle of the month she brought up the mail from the box at the gate on the rural route. The town paper interested her only casually and she did not read it until the evening. On the front page was a picture of Bill and a two-column story that Johnny Williams had written himself. Her father, reading over her shoulder, patted her on the back and moved the lamp closer to her. She became excited and the character in the story lost all reality for her. Two weeks ago a policeman, riding through a city park on his bicycle, noticed a man sitting on a bench. The man's clothes were torn and dirty, and he had a beard. He had no hat. He leaned on the bench, his eyes closed. The officer got off his wheel and spoke to him, but the man, opening his eyes, muttered words the officer did not understand and tried to get up and go away. Obviously he was very sick or drunk, and the policeman, taking him by the arm, walked slowly to a street corner, where he phoned for an ambulance.

At the hospital they said he evidently hadn't eaten anything for a long time and was out of his mind, and ought to be taken to an asylum. For three days he remained in the hospital; then they removed him to the city asylum, and he became unconscious. Later on the doctors tried to feed him, but he seemed unable to move his jaws, or they were so rigid his mouth could not be opened. He was out of his mind, or was suffering from some emotional hysteria that practically paralyzed him, and when he opened his eyes he spoke to no one. The doctors fed him milk in a tube inserted through his teeth. He got weaker and they believed he was going to die.

In his pockets they found an envelope with his name

and address. They communicated with his mother and told her that her son had only two weeks at most to live and that he might just as well die at home as in the asylum. Old Mrs. Lawson, though recently infirm herself, went down to the city and had insisted that they send Bill home at once. She had him taken to his own home and moved there from her cottage to attend to him and feed him through the tube. She told Doctor Arnold, the local doctor, that he would not die, and for three days would let no one but him see him and was very angry with people who came to see him for the last time on earth. The local doctor said it was unbelievable, but he wouldn't wonder if she kept him alive, though of course he was out of his mind all the time.

Flora cried when she read the paper and knew she ought to go and see him. She kept on crying and pretending to herself that she was reading advertisements in the paper, till her father said that under the circumstances it would be better if she didn't visit him at all; he was being cared for; he had left her and had gone out of his mind, and, anyway, had ill-treated her, and she had her own life to live. Her mother said that it was a fine sentimental notion, to see her husband, yet it was impracticable and the consequences couldn't be predicted, so it would be better not to see him.

She had no inclination to go and see Bill. Peeling potatoes in the kitchen at noontime, she closed her eyes and thought of him, his face covered with hair, his jaws locked. At night, stretched out on the bed, she felt unhappy and almost sick, hardly able to believe she had ever known such a man. Uneasily she suspected that her father and mother would declare that it was her duty to nurse him. Next morning they told her they understood some of her feeling and agreed that she should remain away from him. After that they were careful not to mention his name to her.

She would not go into town with her mother or father

and stopped going to church on Sunday. She did not come to this very positive opinion suddenly; only after she had thought of the arid days in her life with Bill before he had gone away. Her first feeling of sympathy for him she guarded cautiously, determined it should not convince her to see him and afterward regret it. She was a young woman who ought not to waste her life with an invalid, who had ill-treated her and separated himself from her. Her mother and father both believed that he would die and that it was foolish to prolong his life artificially. The talk of death shocked Flora, made her think of religion and a funeral, and vague thoughts of an after-life she couldn't encompass and she tried to imagine herself dead, but lived on over her thoughts, and it seemed then that Bill would live on in her thoughts, even though he ought to die. He would die and she would go to his funeral, but in that way could not separate herself from thoughts of him.

Haying-time was over, it was getting dark early. Her mother, sitting in the parlor, was mending socks, her glasses tipped down on her nose. Flora was knitting a sweater she intended to give to her mother. Without lifting her eyes from the knitting Flora suggested that she might get a divorce and go away and live in another town. Her mother withdrew the palm of her hand from the sock and pinned the needle in the ball of yarn.

"Who with?" she asked sharply.

"No one. I don't want to live with any one."

"Well, you'd better not."

She looked steadily at Flora, went on darning and never mentioned it again.

Snow fell lightly early in December. They had only one hired man for the winter. Her father was planning a new silo for next spring. Though Flora had grown up on the farm, the life now became so dreary that she grasped at any thought promising a break in the monotony. The landscape was dreary, especially at twilight. Bare trees and

barns were outlined against an early winter sky at twilight. She took long walks by herself on the rural routes, sometimes thinking of meeting a young man and having a conversation with him, or of going into town at night and walking the side streets till she met a young man she didn't know very well. Her father and mother would be indignant if she ever walked with Pete Hastings now Bill was back in town. At Christmas-time the snow was thick on the fields. It was a bad Christmas, though they all went over to Maloney's and took small presents off a Christmas-tree. The next morning, throwing out dish-water from the back-door step, she looked westward where the line of hills curved, wondering why the blue hills had so little color in the winter.

Her father sometimes mentioned Bill, but she imagined he was just eager to talk, passing the time in the evening, and paid no attention to him. He thought it remarkable that Bill should have lived, and had heard that he was sitting up in a chair, fed with a spoon by his mother, who had to undress him.

Katie Maloney, wearing a red toque and a green muffler, came along the road at four o'clock in the afternoon and waved to Flora. Talking rapidly and sincerely, she said that many people were going to see Bill because they were astonished that he had lived, and she asked if Flora had read the piece about him in the paper. Katie unfolded the paper and Flora read the story. Johnny Williams believed that Bill had been working too hard on some great human undertaking, and had worried himself out of his right mind and had nearly died. But he had lived because he had a great mother, and might some day recover.

Katie Maloney said: "Do you think he'd mind if next time I was in town I went around to see him?"

"Why should he mind if he's out of his head?"

"I hope he wouldn't mind. It'd be no use seeing him if he minded."

Flora was angry with her father for not having shown

her the paper last evening, but was unable to understand why she was angry with him, because she knew that he always avoided talking to her about Bill. She sat alone in her bedroom wondering why Katie Maloney had been so anxious to see him, talking as if it were a distinction to see a sick man with a wind in the head.

All week she wondered whether the Maloney girl had seen Bill. On a Thursday afternoon Katie came over to see her, eager to talk. "It was odd, so awfully odd I couldn't say anything," she said. "He just sat there in a chair and he had a dark-brown beard."

"And didn't he speak at all?"

"No, he didn't speak at all; just sat there, staring out the window, paying no attention to me."

"Why didn't you speak to him?"

"Well, I wanted to, but mainly to reach out and touch him. I heard it said last Sunday that to reach out and touch him was good luck against getting sick."

"Who told you such a thing, Katie?"

"Oh, I heard it last week. They say he was having such wonderful thoughts and he went out of his mind. Nearly everybody knows it now."

She walked down the lane with Kate, laughing out loud while Kate nodded her head vigorously. On the way back to the house she thought of people timidly touching Bill and felt restless and unhappy. She noticed that the barn roof was sagging. The foundations of the house and barn were of stone. The house was of brick but the shingles on the roof were warped and loose. Next time she met Kate she would tell her about Bill's fine thoughts and how he had studied hard, and the story of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who had lived in the Middle Ages. Katie would shake her head two or three times and go home and tell it to her mother. Then Flora felt ashamed of herself for taking Kate's talk seriously, as if any one could tell her anything about Bill.

For days she was muddled, wondering why so many

people should be interested in Bill now that he was sick and out of his mind. Three weeks later, in the morning, she took the buggy and drove into Gardner's grocery-store. Mr. Gardner was amiable, and, wrapping up tea and bananas for her, asked if she thought old Mrs. Lawson would mind if on Sunday afternoon he dropped in to see Bill. He admitted that he hadn't known Bill very well when he worked on the paper, but had heard, since, that he was a great thinker and scholar, and believed he might have many wonderful things to tell some day, if he ever got better. She assured Mr. Gardner that it was all right for him to go and see Bill. She spoke spitefully of Mrs. Lawson, who was practically an interloper.

"They say he just sits there in a chair," Mr. Gardner said.

"Yes, he just sits there, looking out the window."

"They say he's out of his mind, but I don't believe it. The Lord only knows the things he sees and hears sitting there like that. It's not for the likes of us to say. And, besides, he was a very religious man."

"You go and see him, Mr. Gardner, and it's all right."

In the buggy again she was indignant that people would ask if old Mrs. Lawson would mind if they saw Bill. "He's at least my husband," she thought.

Most of the way home she thought of Bill sitting in the chair and believed now that it was wonderful that people should be anxious to see him and touch him, though he never moved or opened his mouth. It was likely, as Mr. Gardner suggested, that he was not really out of his mind at all but having his own fine thoughts. She slapped the horse's haunches, the buggy swaying, the wheels grinding over small rocks on the road. Here the farms were back from the road and sawed-off or charred stumps stuck out of the melting snow.

In the evening she discovered that her mother had heard all the strange talk about Bill. Flora talked angrily of Bill's mother, and then, talking idly, told the story of

the grandmother who had got off the boat before it left the old country. Her mother was ironing and listening attentively. Flora said: "Oh, I'll bet a dollar most people's grandpeople were just as interesting when it comes down to brass tacks."

She coaxed her mother to talk of her people. Her mother remembered an aunt who had lived in the town, in the days when people thought it would become a railroad centre. The aunt ran a boarding-house for trainmen and travellers near to the station. She ran the house for ten years and made some money. "I can remember seeing her one day with her apron full of dollar bills," she said. And then the boarding-house was burned down. "She had few boarders, and I can remember plain as day seeing my aunt coming out of a hole in the fence, and I knew in my soul that she had set fire to the house to get the insurance."

Flora thought that it wasn't a story she could very well tell to other people. "Wasn't there anybody in our family who got to be well known up here years ago?" she asked.

"Of course there was; people to be proud of."

"Who? Have I heard about them?"

"For instance, there was my uncle on my mother's side that laid the first track in a section of the country up around here when most of it was bush. They gave him a gold watch and a beautiful broadcloth suit. I can remember that broadcloth suit as plain as day, seeing the way he'd hang it up or put it on."

9

Early in March she thought of going into town some night and peeping in the window at Bill. Slowly, she must go slowly, she would look in the back window and see him sitting in his chair; no one else would be there; she would not have to talk to him or the old lady. Other

people, not even her mother, would know that she had seen him, for he no longer was her husband, but a strange man, who sat all day in a chair without opening his mouth.

At the end of March there was a thaw. The first weeks in April were warm, with a little rain that took the last snow from the fields. The roads were muddy, though they could use the Ford; the sound of running water came from streams in the hills. She drove into town with her father at the end of the second week in April. Her father got out at the flour-and-feed store and left her sitting in the car. Her father had his hand on the door-knob when she called to him that she would go and see some neighbors and meet him later, at four o'clock, opposite the town hall. He opened his mouth, surprised, shrugged his shoulders, and went into the store. She walked south as far as the station and began to cross the tracks to the path on the field by the water-tower. Half-way across the field she stood still, nervous and hesitant. The strong sun and the clear day and the green tints underneath the dun-colored grass gave her assurance. She looked toward the house. The shade on the front window was raised. The veranda was clean. The lawn, drab and dirty after winter snow, held a strip of ice the sun could not reach, close to the base of the veranda.

Slowly she walked on the path, and at the iron gate her fingers fumbled with the catch; the gate, released, swung away from her, her eyes following it anxiously, waiting for the swing toward her, as though the movement away from her held some personal rebuff. Smiling to herself, she walked as far as the front veranda, then hesitated, feeling that she ought to rap on the door, angry with herself for being embarrassed. It made her uncomfortable to think of entering her own house. She compromised and went around the side entrance to the back door, because she knew that if she went up the

front steps she would rap on the front door. She walked quietly along the alleyway.

Standing on the second step of the back porch, leaning to the left, she could see into the kitchen. New white lace curtains were on the kitchen window. Almost off balance, she peered through the window and saw Bill sitting in an armchair at the end of the kitchen table. She knew that it was Bill, though he resembled no one she had ever known, with his beard long and black, cut squarely and awkwardly, and the old pair of pants, and white shirt open at the throat. Trembling, she sat down slowly on the step. Thoughts of Bill were confusing because she could think only of the man in the chair. "Now I've seen him, I'll go away," she murmured, and got up, but couldn't move away from the steps. Tentatively, she reached out to touch the door-knob. Her mouth opened a little, and hardly breathing, she twisted the knob, opening the door two inches. Quickly she closed it again, rubbing the tips of her fingers together.

Again she turned to leave the back yard and go home, but her right hand reached out, turned the knob and opened the door wide. Believing that she was leaning back, treading cautiously, she tiptoed on the kitchen floor toward Bill. His head, turned away from the door, did not move. She stood three paces away from him, regarding him intently, and when he never moved, her eyes glanced quickly around the room. The kitchen oilcloth on the floor was clean and freshly washed. She moved closer to him, craning her neck to see his face, putting out her right foot gradually, taking the long step deliberately, prepared to lower her eyes when he turned. He didn't hear her. Uneasily she put the palm of her hand over her mouth, ready to run out of the room suddenly. Instead, she bent down, extended her arm, and with the tips of her fingers touched his knee. His head moved slowly, she withdrew her hand, imagining that she was smiling nicely. She stepped back a pace, watching his head moving.

Steadily he regarded her, without knowing her, and she knew that she had become simply another object in the room, one with the stove, the sink, the table. She felt helpless and unimportant.

"How are you feeling, Bill?" she asked, hoping no one had heard.

Softly she said, "Bill, Bill, Bill," but he paid no attention. More confidently she moved closer to him and touched his shoulder, then she touched his knee. Listening carefully, she put the palm of her left hand flat on the table and bent toward him, her mouth opening as her right hand touched his beard, crisp and dark, her fingers passed through the hair, her arm trembling as she watched him.

At first she had been timid, like a little girl, now she breathed easily, ready to talk to him as though he were a child. "He knows I'm here, that's one thing he can't fool me about," she thought. She remembered that Gardner, the grocer, had insisted that Bill had many thoughts about people as he sat in the chair like a paralytic. Such a notion made her feel uncomfortable, and she moved away, afraid that he might be thinking of the night she had sat on the sofa in the front room with Pete Hastings. "Well, now, Bill," she said quietly and firmly, liking the sound of it, "well, now, Bill." That was the way she would have talked to him before he got sick and he would have listened good-naturedly. Now he remained aloof and solemn, his face white and thin, absolutely uninterested in her. She was impressed and knew she could not talk authoritatively. He was far beyond her, she could not touch him.

She sat down on a chair in front of the kitchen stove. A fire was in the stove, though it was early spring, and red coals were in the open grate—a bright charcoal fire to warm the house and keep the kettle boiling. She avoided looking at him and stared at the red coals in the grate, determined to get used to the feeling that he was in the

room, watching her. Her head kept turning toward him, but her eyes were averted. Realizing that it was like a game gave her more assurance.

She even pretended that he wasn't in the room and got up to look at herself in the mirror beside the window. Her cheeks were flushed, her brooch too high on her throat. Deliberately she unfastened the brooch to show more of her throat and breasts than she had ever shown walking in the street, or even when dressed in the house. The two-year-old spring coat she had on was faded and a little tight, so she took it off, tossing it over a chair. Paying no attention to Bill, she bent over the chair, taking her purse from the coat-pocket, then her powder-puff and lipstick from the purse. Her hand was trembling and she applied the lipstick unevenly, her face close to the mirror, her little finger wiping the lower lip, straightening the line. In the mirror she could see him, just the side of his head, and imagined he was watching her, and hoped he would not see that she was excited.

She was satisfied with her image and smiled, and turned, walking toward him. "Poor Bill," she said. More at home now, she repeated: "Poor Bill, isn't this the limit!" She leaned over him, knowing that her shoulder and breast were very white and hoping that his eyes would drop to the hollow under the brooch. She didn't expect him to speak to her, but it was essential he should notice that she was bending over him. Any recognition of her, as a woman, would have satisfied her. His chin remained at the same angle, his head never moved. Straightening up abruptly, she sneered, slapping him on the knee. Terrified at having struck him, she took two steps backward, her hand over her mouth.

"Poor Bill," she said sympathetically. Moving back to the table, she began to talk eagerly. "I went away, Bill, because I couldn't stand it; not because I had anything really against you. And you weren't interested in me, and I was left alone. That was the way it was with me, Bill."

She bent her head back, observing him closely. He was looking at her, the same indifferent expression in his eyes. She had talked to him and he had moved his head. Encouraged, she talked more excitedly, her hand at first just touching his beard, then stroking through it as she talked.

"It's terrible to have to go in and out all day by yourself, Bill. We were living together and I had only my own thoughts. A woman that's my age and only married 'bout two years shouldn't never be left like that. She gets thinking and things get all mixed up and it never does her any good. But wasn't I silly to be afraid of you?"

Some movement of objection ought to have come from him, and she watched his eyes. She found it so easy to say she had been afraid of him that she believed it. Then she saw that he was really looking beyond her at the window. Discouraged, she went on talking, sure, now, that nothing she could say would ever interest him, though convinced that he could hear her. Words or sounds would never interest him. Slowly and awkwardly she talked and the sound of her own voice saddened her. She turned away.

She sat on the chair by the stove. Some one was moving in the parlor, the sofa creaking. Slippers dragged and flopped along the floor; Bill's mother came into the kitchen, the hem at the back of her dress dragging on the floor.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, pulling up her dress.

"Yes, it's me."

"I thought I heard some one out here, but I was half asleep, though I thought I'd better come out." She was tidying her hair. She had on a black dress with large grey dots.

"I wanted to see Bill," Flora said apologetically.

"When was that?"

"To-day; I wanted to get a look at him."

"I don't suppose there's any harm in it."

"There's no harm in it, and I shouldn't have to explain that I wanted to see Bill."

"Neither you should."

Flora glanced at the clock; twenty minutes to four. "I got to go now," she said. "I got to meet pa in front of the town hall at four o'clock."

"Well, good-by, Flora."

"Of course I'll come back to-morrow. Maybe I ought to nurse Bill."

"Bill's got along all right so far."

"Now you're not sayin' it wouldn't be best for his own wife to nurse him."

"It's not nursin' he wants. He's just that way. He may get better, he may not. Some one has to look after him, though. If you fancied it, why didn't you do it long ago?"

"Now don't you go on talking like that; you know well I was scared of him."

"Maybe you were and maybe you weren't, but there's not many who'd be scared of the likes of Bill now."

"I got to go now, but I'll be back to-morrow."

"It won't do Bill any good; you best keep away."

"It won't harm him, and I guess I can come into my own house, anyway."

"Maybe you can; you didn't knock to-day, anyway."

"I can't fight about it now, I got to go."

10

On the way home she told her father she had decided to live with Bill because it was her duty to be with him and nurse him. Crops had not been good last fall, so her father did not object to her going away. At home, after tea she walked by herself, eagerly looking forward to leaving the farm and the stables and the family odor of the house. Her shoes got muddy. She sat down, scraping the soles with a twig, talking to herself and having

much the better of an imaginary argument with old Mrs. Lawson: she gave Bill's mother a bad setting-out, supplying her remarks and her own caustic answers. Darkness came early. The sky was clouded and no birds were singing. She got up and walked home rapidly. Uninteresting details of her life in the town in the old days now seemed important and she looked forward to having long conversations with Dolly Knox and Mrs. Fulton. Neighbors, stopping her on the street, would ask about Bill. After teaching her how to feed Bill, the old lady would go and live in her cottage.

At breakfast next morning she talked quietly to her father and mother, assuming a new dignity and a detached importance as she explained she could earn a good living dressmaking. Last night she had washed a pair of silk stockings and a pink silk waist that she had never worn on the farm. Her hips were a little wider, her face fuller, than a year ago. She wore a new girdle and garters to hold her stockings up tightly and keep her legs neat and smooth. Humming, she put on her hat, as though expecting to be very happy on a long journey.

Her father drove her into town and to the house. Before getting out of the car, she coaxed him to go as far as the door with her, fearing, at the last moment, that the old lady would be nasty when she opened the door. He shook his head and would not get out of the car. She opened the gate. The lawn looked fresher this morning, there was more sunlight. The cinder path was firm underfoot. Two women she could not recognize without staring were on the other side of the street. Mrs. Fulton's front door opened two or three inches. Flora, carrying her suitcase, climbed the veranda steps, determined that nothing the old lady might say would induce her to go away until after dark.

Bill's mother, opening the door, said: "I'd an idea you'd come, but I didn't think you'd be along so early." She

added, as Flora lowered the suitcase to the floor: "Doin' a lot of shoppin' in town?"

"No, my clothes are in that bag."

"Movin'? Goin' away some place?"

"You know very well I'm not. I'm comin' to stay here."

Disregarding her entirely, Flora went through to the kitchen, taking off her gloves and coat. Bill was in the armchair beside the window. A basin of water, a cake of soap, and a towel were on the table, and his hair was damp. His forehead was clean and shiny and his hair uncombed. Shyly Flora half turned, looking toward his mother, then took a comb from her purse and began to part his hair, her hand trembling at first because he was so helpless she wanted to cry. She parted his hair carefully, neatly, liking the white line of the part. "Don't you know me, Bill?" she asked.

"Don't do that," his mother said behind her.

"Don't do what?"

"Comb his hair like that."

"Why shouldn't I do it?" Flora said angrily.

"Don't do it, do you hear me? No one else has done it but me since he got sick. You're a wicked, silly woman and ought to go away at once and leave my son alone."

"I'm not wicked."

"Well, you're silly, anyway."

"And I'm not silly. I guess I can comb my own husband's hair, can't I?"

"He might have died for all you cared."

"Please, Mrs. Lawson, please don't talk to me like that; I just want to be with Bill."

"You don't, you don't, you know you don't, you just want to have him here."

"Get away out of here, you evil old woman. Or shut up, do you hear? Shut up, or I'll shake you."

Bill's mother, moaning softly, went into the parlor. Flora heard the moaning and the springs sagging in the sofa. "Stop it, do you hear, or you'll drive me frantic,"

she yelled. The old woman kept on moaning, Flora went on combing Bill's hair, her whole body trembling, and certain he had not noticed that she had been quarrelling with his mother. "There you are now, Bill. You look as nice as you ever did," she said. She put the comb back in her purse, glanced aimlessly around the kitchen, then opened the back door to go out and sit down in the fresh air, for her legs were weak. Her lips were dry. She got a cup of water from the pump.

The grass on the back lawn was dry and long, green in spots. A clothes-basket, upside down, lay on the grass. Along the base of the fence stalks of last year's flowers were pressed against the earth. Next month would be lilac-time, and already the bush was tipped with yellow-green buds. This year she would have a big vegetable-garden as well as flowers, since Bill would not be working. A great many people would come to the house to see Bill, or bring material for dressmaking, and she would show them the garden and the flowers—tall pink-and-white hollyhocks at the back of the yard, splendid in the evening at sunset. Bill had never cared much for flowers, mainly because of his steady serious thoughts. She heard Mrs. Fulton opening her back door and got up quickly to go into the house, not ready to talk to her yet.

The old lady, who was feeding Bill, did not glance at Flora when she came in. In one hand she had a big spoon and in the other hand a bowl of some kind of soup. Bill's head was tilted far back, the neck resting on the back of the chair. His mother, putting the spoon firmly against his teeth, barely parted his jaws and poured the soup down his throat. Flora, leaning forward, her lower lip hanging, held her breath, her eyes following the spoon to the bowl and then to his teeth.

"Let me do it?" she whispered.

"Please move away, or sit down some place."

Flora sat down at the other end of the table. The old woman fed Bill. Suddenly she said: "I used to have to

feed him with a tube through his nose; how would you have liked that?"

"It's awful, and maybe I couldn't have done it."

"They didn't think anybody would do it."

"Everybody says it was wonderful the things you done."

"HMMMMMM."

Then old Mrs. Lawson put dishes on the table and set a place for Flora. They had lunch together. They weren't friendly, but Flora, very hungry, ate rapidly. Afterward she put all the dishes in a basin and washed and dried them herself. She cleaned the table while Bill's mother was out in the yard.

It rained early in the afternoon: the falling rain saddened her and she went up-stairs and lay down on the bed and started to cry. She powdered her eye-lids and came down-stairs and said she would appreciate it if they could be friendly because she only wanted to stay in the house with Bill. His mother, shrugging her shoulders, said: "Where were you counting upon sleeping? With your husband?" Flora dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and Bill's mother said: "Oh, well, I suppose it's your house."

"Can't we both stay in the house? What's the matter with that?"

"That's what we'll have to do, I suppose," she said gruffly. Flora knew that she was pleased.

Feeling much better, Flora went out and sat on the front veranda, prepared to talk with any one who might pass along the street. Though the rain had stopped, the sky was slate-colored, and no one came along the cinder path. Soon many people would know that she had come back, and anxiously she thought of talking with Dolly and "Curly" Knox, wondering if Dolly would be friendly. She felt restless and got up, walking slowly down the front path to the iron gate, resting her elbows on the cold metal. Then she opened the gate and walked along the cinder path toward Dolly's place. Dolly must have seen her

coming, for she came out on the veranda and waved excitedly, then ran down the steps and along the path to fling her arms around Flora's neck and kiss her.

"I'm just taking a little walk; I got to get right back," Flora said.

"We were over to see Bill last night, 'Curly' and me; ain't he wonderful?"

Dolly asked many questions very rapidly and was impressed when Flora told her she had come home to nurse Bill. Dolly said very simply and honestly that Bill was in many ways the most interesting man that had ever lived in the town. That was what "Curly" said, and later on everybody in the whole country would agree with him. Flora said modestly that both Dolly and "Curly" would be always welcome in her house, and then she told about the plan to do dressmaking for a living, and Dolly was enthusiastic. So they walked back to Flora's together, arm in arm, and Dolly, giggling eagerly, told her that now nearly everybody knew that Mr. Starr was carrying on with the Gibson woman that lived in the cottage down near the water-works by the bay. Dolly looked a bit sloppy, and ought to have been wearing a good pair of corsets, but her face was fresh and her hair had just been washed. They stood at the gate, Flora glancing around slyly to see if any one passing on the street noticed her, and Dolly told how "Curly" had followed Mr. Starr one night to Mrs. Gibson's place and had waited around for three hours before Mr. Starr came out, and all the time there didn't seem to be a light in the house. Mr. Starr had lots of money and Gibsons were very poor, but it was a shame that Mr. Gibson pretended to know nothing about it. No one had much sympathy for Mrs. Starr, because she was a very difficult woman. Flora said that sooner or later some one would complain to the constable, and added that she had to go in at once and feed Bill. She promised Dolly to visit her the following night and have a game of five-hundred.

Just before supper-time she did learn how to feed Bill and give him water to drink. Afterward she felt happy. The sun came out to shine brilliantly just before setting. Some kids from down the road came to the back door, asking could they see Bill. She sat down on a chair, hooking her heels on a rung, watching a kid with a dirty face and a pair of suspenders over a sleeveless sweater walk over to Bill and touch his leg. The three kids touched him, made faces at him, and laughed. Flora was indignant and got up to tell the kids to go home, but the old lady, who was putting some charcoal on the fire, then poking at the grate, said that Bill didn't mind it and the children liked it. Flora took the kettle off the stove to pour hot water over the supper-dishes in the sink. Out of the corner of her eye she watched one of the kids climbing onto Bill's knee till he could reach his face and rub his small hand through Bill's beard, tickling his chin. Suddenly Flora heard a laugh, a slow chuckle from Bill. The kettle dropped from her hand into the sink. The old lady sat up straight, lurched forward, recovered her balance, then hobbled across the floor. Two of the kids began to cry and they all ran out the back door.

"He laughed," Flora said.

"Oh, my God, glory be to God, he laughed."

Flora stroked Bill's beard eagerly, muttering in his ear, and even shook his head, but he was not interested. His mother was kneeling on the floor, praying sincerely, her lips moving rapidly. She noticed Flora and said, "Go tell Doctor Arnold," then went on praying. Flora hurried out the front door. On the other side of the street she saw Mrs. English, from the west side of the town, whom she hardly knew, walking slowly. "Bill laughed out loud," Flora called to her. Mrs. English spun round sharply, then watched Flora hurrying along the path, her hand over her mouth. Pools of water were on the cinder path where cinders had worn away. Flora zigzagged along the path, avoiding the puddles. At the corner she was glad to

see Mrs. Starr on her veranda. A wide stretch of lawn was between Flora and Mrs. Starr, but Flora, cupping her hands, yelled: "Oh, Mrs. Starr."

Mrs. Starr bowed, but Flora couldn't hear what she said. Flora yelled again: "Bill laughed out loud. He really did." This time she heard Mrs. Starr yell, as she stood up suddenly: "You don't say." Mrs. Starr came down the steps, but Flora was too far along the street.

Doctor Arnold, a stout man with a boyish face and a bald head, was playing catch with his two boys on the sidewalk in front of his house. Flora grabbed him by the arm and told him that Bill had laughed out loud. He examined the stitches on the baseball in his hand, tossed the ball in the air, caught it, then dropped it on the sidewalk and said: "Isn't that odd? It's odd, very odd, isn't it odd? I'll come right along with you now, Mrs. Lawson."

Walking with Flora he explained that if Bill had laughed, he might just as well talk some day. It might be a long time before he spoke to any one, but it was possible. Anything was possible. He had never been able to understand Bill's condition, though he supposed he was simply out of his mind. People in town suffering from nervous diseases had gone down to the asylum at Whitby and in a few years, or in a month or two, had become normal again. So there was always something to look forward to.

In the kitchen old Mrs. Lawson sat beside Bill, her hand on his shoulder, but he remained motionless and indifferent. The old lady got up quickly when the doctor came in. The doctor looked at Bill's eyes, shrugged his shoulders, looked at the eyes again, and said that he was looking well, though apparently he hadn't changed much. Still, if he had laughed, he had laughed.

Bill's mother wanted to argue with the doctor, who remained good-humored, talked genially till he got to the front door, then he shook hands with her. The old woman came back to the kitchen, and Flora, standing in

the hall, heard the doctor talking to Mrs. Fulton, next door.

Then Mrs. Fulton came in and shook hands warmly with Flora and asked if she could see Bill for a minute or two: she had just heard that he had laughed out loud. At first she thought she could only stay a minute, but she sat down for a long talk.

Later in the evening Mrs. McGuin, Dolly Knox, and Mrs. Starr came in and they all sat down, very friendly and curious. Dolly Knox got up and touched Bill's forehead with the palm of her hand, then the other women touched him, but he did not laugh again. Flora put a linen table-cloth on the kitchen table and got out the good spoons and made some tea while the old lady answered many questions. Flora was nice and considerate of her mother-in-law, who brought in a cake from the sideboard. Some of the questions Flora answered importantly.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Starr got up to go home and met Johnny Williams coming in the front door, so she decided to stay a minute longer. Johnny was limping a little and had a bad cold. He kept blowing his nose. In every pocket he had a clean handkerchief. He said that *The Standard* wouldn't be out, fortunately, for two days, and he'd have something worth while to say about Bill. Flora talked happily and Mr. Williams said that he would have come to see her, anyway. Very seriously Johnny talked to Bill, bending over him, touching his chin, twisting his ear, and everybody watched eagerly, but Bill was not interested. "He's a wonder," Johnny said, straightening up.

They talked casually now, and old Mrs. Lawson yawned twice, very tired. Everybody assured her she was very tired, and they all went out together. Still yawning, the old woman said that she might as well show Flora how to undress Bill. "It's not hard to undress him, and when he's sleepy, he goes to bed easily," she said. "He's not really paralyzed. People around here seem to think his legs and

body is made of stone from his grandfather's quarry. It's his mind that's wrong."

They undressed him together and put him to bed in the front room. Flora said she would sleep on the sofa, in the same room.

The old woman went up-stairs, a lamp in her hand, and Flora, undressing slowly in the front room, wondered if Bill, lying awake on the bed, could see her. His eyes were open: he was looking up at the ceiling. Before putting on her nightgown, she bent over him to kiss his forehead. His eyes followed her, but he didn't move his head. She turned out the light and lay down on the sofa, shifting her body close to the wall, so she would not fall off in the night. Her eyes remained wide open and she couldn't go to sleep. It was quiet outside. Listening carefully she heard wind in the leaves on the trees. A screen was in the window, the shade raised a foot. She heard footfalls crunching on the cinder path, a steady long stride and a firm crunch opposite the house, now farther down the street till she could no longer follow it. It was nearly eleven o'clock and the footfalls were Henry Longman's, who worked in Eggleston's butcher-store, that kept open till a quarter to eleven. Every night his footfalls passed the window at this time and she knew the slow, easy, swinging stride. She lay there listening, wondering if he had passed the house every night at the same hour while she was away. In a half-hour Mr. McGuin would come along the cinder path, walking with his quick, jerky stride, as though determined to get home ahead of time, the soles of his feet scraping on the cinders. She was wide awake, waiting for Mr. McGuin to pass. Later on, if any one else passed the house, she would not be able to recognize the stride and would wonder who it was. Many pictures and thoughts were in her head, and she even imagined she could hear Bill chuckling again. Many women had come to the house to see her and Bill, and had talked to her respectfully—one of the most interesting women in town.

She breathed lightly, closing her eyes peacefully, and heard Bill breathing steadily. She turned over on her side to make out the shape of his head on the pillow. The sofa was not very comfortable. His head, alone on the pillow, suggested an exciting idea that made her feel weak. She ought to get into bed beside Bill, put her arm around him, the warmth of her body arousing him so he would put his arm around her. She resisted the thought, her whole body sweating till she tossed off the cover and, shivering, knew she was too restless to go to sleep. She got up and lit the lamp.

First she went into the kitchen and opened all the cupboard drawers, casually counting plates and cups. Then she thought of going up-stairs to the sewing-room and reading parts from the books that had interested Bill. Holding the lamp over her head, she climbed up-stairs and turned into the sewing-room. The machine was there, but no chair, no pile of books. The room had been cleaned and there wasn't a piece of paper in the machine drawers. The window was open a few inches and a light breeze made the lamp smoke, darkening the glass at the top. She picked up the lamp and went into her mother-in-law's room.

The old woman sat up in bed. "Who's there? Is that you Flora?"

"I was going to look at Bill's papers and books. Where are they?"

"Where are they? I cursed them and burned the last one of them. It was them that took away his mind."

Flora could find no words. The lamp tilted, the flame burned at an angle. The old woman's lips were twitching, and one hand touched the nightgown buttoned high on her throat.

Flora turned away and went down-stairs to the front room. She blew out the light and lay down on the sofa again. Now she had so many things to think of, she assured herself she would remain wide awake until Mr.

McGuin passed on the cinder path; but suddenly she felt very tired and fell asleep.

11

So she lived contentedly in the May and June months, and many neighbors brought material for dresses for her, and talked sometimes all afternoon while she worked neatly. Pete Hastings was shy the first time he came to the house. She spoke nicely to him, making him understand something had happened that placed her far beyond him, and it would be foolish for him to have thoughts of making love to a woman who was so respected by everybody in the town. At first he had shrugged his shoulders, sneering, but he became impressed finally. Old Mrs. Lawson liked him, so he came often and had long conversations with Flora about Bill, who walked to his bed in the evening. Three times Pete weeded the garden for her; the beans and lettuce and carrots were ripe.

He sat on the back steps with her in the early afternoon, while she basted on a sleeve in a dress she was making for Mrs. Eggleston. He had on a white shirt, the sleeves rolled up, and was mopping his forehead with a big handkerchief. The air was hot and sticky and heavy; there had been no rain the first seven days in July. The early roses were blooming and the wild-rose climber, on the picket fence, was a spray of blossoms.

"It's kind of hot sitting out here in the sun," he said.

"What do you want to do, Pete?"

"I'd like you to come along for a walk in the shade, but you won't do that any more."

"No, I wouldn't do it; besides, I got to look after Bill now."

"Well, let's sit in the kitchen; it's cool there, anyway."

Doubtfully, she looked up at him, for she had made up her mind not to be alone in the house with him any more.

Bill was sitting in the kitchen, but Pete never seemed to notice him. She was afraid that she would encourage Pete to make love to her and regret it afterward, when other people heard about it.

They sat down in the kitchen. Pete, nodding his head at Bill, said: "How is he?"

"Just the same."

"He'll always be just the same."

"Well, what if he is the same?"

"It's no good for you, a pretty little woman like you, and the likes of him to keep you company all night."

"He's more to me than that. In a way he's never meant so much to me as he does now."

"Oh, go on."

"No, I mean it."

"But it's different about you and me. He, himself, would see that he's no good to you in many ways, so if you feel that way . . ."

"I want to feel that way."

"Well, you could still feel that way, and I'd be loving you only because he couldn't. You needn't think any the less of him."

"I know, it sounds all right."

"Sure, come here, Flora." He got up, moved close to her, picked her up off the chair, and sat down with her on his knee. For a moment she sat on his knee without moving, his hands were warm and heavy, her whole body was tingling, then she straightened her legs suddenly and said: "Put me down, Pete; do you hear? Put me down, put me down, put me down!"

"Lord, Flora, what's got into you?"

She moved away from him, smoothing her dress, staring intently at Bill, sitting in his chair by the window, his head turned away from her. Leaning forward, she listened earnestly, then her shoulders drooped and she sighed. "I can't get used to him," she muttered. "I have a feeling he knows everything that's going on in the kitchen."

"He's not even looking at us, Flora. Come on."

"No, it isn't worth while."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah, it's so."

She was looking at Pete's smooth, heavy face when she heard some one at the window say: "I'd like a cream puff, or a chocolate eclair."

She turned abruptly. Bill's lips moved again, his eyes retaining the expression of indifference: "I'd like a cream puff."

"Bill, oh, Bill," she said. "You heard it, Pete? Oh, Bill." But he didn't move his lips again.

Distracted she turned around twice, then rushed into the front room, looking for her mother-in-law, who had gone to call on one of the neighbors and wouldn't be home for at least an hour. She told Pete to go down to the store and get some cream puffs and run all the way back. Pete opened his mouth to be sullen, but couldn't help watching Bill. He went out the front door.

She shook Bill's head. He would not speak again. She stood on the back steps and yelled: "Mrs. Fulton, Mrs. Fulton, Mrs. Fulton." Mrs. Fulton, wiping her hands on her apron, said: "I never heard anything like it in my life. I'll come right in." As soon as she came into the kitchen, they heard Pete coming in the front door with a bag of cream puffs. Flora opened the bag, took one, her hand trembling as she put it on a plate, and got a fork from the table drawer. She put the plate in front of Bill, and began to cry quietly when he took the cream puff in his hand and began to eat slowly, enjoying it thoroughly. Flora felt that if any one said anything he would stop eating, so she kept a finger on her lips, warning Pete and Mrs. Fulton. He finished the cream puff, took a deep breath, and turned his head from them.

Bill's mother talked anxiously to Flora when they had strawberries and cream together at tea-time. Flora put down her spoon suddenly and said: "I'm going for a

little walk. I want to be alone a while." Her forehead had got hot and her heart was beating unevenly. Her mother-in-law saw that she was excited and didn't object when she went out the front door.

Flora walked along the cinder path, walking lightly, her legs moving slowly. At the corner she hesitated, smiled to herself, and crossed over to Starrs' gate and walked up the driveway to the front door. Mrs. Starr opened the door for her and said it was thoughtful of Mrs. Lawson to call and come right in and have a cup of tea with her. Flora sat down at Mrs. Starr's table, wondering where the woman's husband was at tea-time. The room was large, with an elegant plate-rail, many colored cups and plates on it, and there was a fine soft rug and polished walnut furniture. Mrs. Starr's tiny head and beaky nose bobbed up and down, listening to the story about the cream puff. Flora talked slowly, importantly, and took three cups of tea, and Mrs. Starr made many handsome efforts to be very friendly. "I was thinking of your husband, Bill, two nights ago," she said. "So yesterday I got a little present for him. Something a man like Bill will appreciate later on when he gets a little better. I'll get it now."

Taking short steps, she left the room and went up-stairs. Flora leaned back in the chair, contented and comfortable. Mrs. Starr come down again with a large holy picture, holding it out with both hands—a picture of a red sacred heart, some white angels, and a blue background and a gold frame.

"He had a religious turn of mind and this is the sort of thing that'll appeal to him," Mrs. Starr said.

"The colors are lovely," Flora said. "And it's so generous of you. I'll take it right along with me."

"I'll wrap it up," Mrs. Starr said.

Holding the picture, wrapped neatly in thick brown paper, under her arm, Flora walked down the driveway to the corner. She did not want to go home at once, she felt lively, exhilarated, and decided to go for a walk by

herself, south past the old rough-cast house. Every few steps she took a deep breath, but had no interesting thoughts; simply happy because she knew Bill would get better, and she had avoided a complicated affair with Pete. She walked all the way down to the water-works, a low dark-brick building, and heard the engines and smelled the steam, and took a drink of water that she couldn't swallow because it seemed to taste of steam. A cool breeze was coming from the bay. She stood up straight, brushing strands of hair off her forehead to get the cool air. At the back of the building, by the water's edge, she heard voices, and knew some fellows were sitting on the bench under the eave. They heard her footfalls on the picket walk; her legs were in view and the outline of her body. Some one whistled softly and a fellow said smoothly: "Nice legs." She turned round rapidly, going back, and the same voice called: "Where'd you get those legs?" She called, "Shut up, you pigs," and the voice jeered again: "Yeah, nice legs for a piano." Then she was on the street.

The sky was very dark over the bay and the water slapped on the beach. Her thoughts flowed peacefully again. "I'm a lucky woman; I wouldn't let Pete touch me now for a million dollars." Holding the holy picture tightly, she glanced around, as if expecting to see him so she could sneer at him. Suddenly she wanted to run along the street like a tomboy laughing happily. A drop of rain fell on her forehead and she stood under a maple-tree. The town was very quiet and the wind blew through the leaves of the tree. The wind blew a piece of newspaper along the road, holding it against a fence-post.

The rain came down, and as she approached the fence-post the paper got wet and slid to the ground. She was glad of the rain, and the feel of it falling upon her head and shoulder and streaming down her neck, as she walked home, holding the face of the picture tightly against her breasts. Only the paper on the back got wet.

The old lady was darning a sock in the kitchen. Bill sat beside her in his chair, his hands linked on his belly, dozing comfortably, a man relaxing in his own home. Flora had imagined that she would talk angrily about the men down at the water-works, but, instead, smiled good-naturedly, unwrapping the picture, while her mother-in-law scolded her for getting wet. At first Bill's mother didn't appreciate the picture, but she got used to the colors, holding it at various angles, and was pleased and excited when she heard that Mrs. Starr would have tea with them to-morrow. She insisted Flora tell her everything Mrs. Starr had said.

Her clothes were wet, and Flora undressed in the front room. Now she thought of the fellows who had yelled at her as she hurried away from them, and wondered if she were getting old and fat. She was not old, though probably much fatter, and made up her mind to start dieting to-morrow. She sat on the side of the bed, sticking out her bare legs, smooth, round, plump, well-shaped legs, and was indignant that any one would cry out: "Piano legs."

Outside the rain had stopped, so she changed her dress quickly. The sun was shining brightly through the back window into the kitchen. Mrs. Fulton and her mother-in-law were talking over the back fence, very friendly, because Mrs. Fulton was going away to the city. Her husband had been out of work all summer; not a single boat had been in the dry dock. The grass had grown long in Fulton's back yard and the house needed painting. A wheel-barrow, fallen over, and a ladder, had lain on the grass all summer. Some one had moved the ladder, and two wide yellow lines were on the thick green grass. Passing the time, she looked in the kitchen cupboards and discovered they needed sugar. Mrs. Fulton would come in, she thought, before going away, and would make an earnest effort to have a talk to Bill: a nice woman, Mrs. Fulton, though a bit envious of Flora's

importance in the neighborhood. Flora patted her hair, looking at herself in the mirror, and then took her purse, hanging on the kitchen door-knob. She went out the front door, going down the road to get some sugar.

The creek had almost dried up under the wooden bridge. The sun, red in the late afternoon, had passed over the town to the hills. The red sun was setting behind the blue hills, and it shone on the fields and the farms on the hills till they gleamed like lakes in a wooded country. Behind, over the bay, white clouds were banked high on strips of blue. Over the tracks she met Marjorie Stevens, the priest's housekeeper, dressed neatly in black and carrying a blue silk parasol. Marjorie stood talking to her under a maple-tree, the branches spreading over the sidewalk. Marjorie Stevens, one of the most interesting women in town, was friendly, and it occurred to Flora that they might have much to say to each other, now that they were both dignified. Some day Marjorie would ask about Bill, and she would ask about Marjorie's husband, who hadn't been seen since he went to the city.

"It's only a question of time before Bill gets better, I think," Marjorie said.

"Maybe in a year, I hope, and you may be sure he'll not bother again with studyin' and too many books."

"He's very distinguished with his black beard. Will he keep it?"

"I think he will. I want him to."

"Are you going down-street?"

"Yes, I just discovered I was out of sugar. Isn't that sun strong before it goes down!"

"Take my arm, dear, so we'll both be under my parasol, and we'll talk as we go along."

Morley Callaghan was born in Toronto, where he was educated and began his writing career, in company with Ernest Hemingway, on the *Toronto Daily Star*. He became at twenty-five a literary prodigy discovered by Scribner's, who published nine of his books in nine years. Among his recent books are *A Passion in Rome* (1961) and *That Summer in Paris* (1963).

Mr. Callaghan was recently described by a Canadian newspaper as "one of the very best writers of this century." His outstanding contribution to Canadian literature has been recognized by a number of honorary degrees and awards including, in 1970, the Canada Council's Molson Award and the Royal Bank Award, one of the world's richest literary prizes.

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These two short novels beautifully evoke the simplicity of a bygone era in small Ontario towns, when every main street had a flour and feed store, a familiar sound was the trot of a horse along the road, and sin and evil weighed heavily on the human soul. In *An Autumn Penitent* a Baptist preacher, breathing a warning of hell fire for the wilful sinner in a peaceful Methodist community, gains ascendancy over the lives of Joe, a carpenter, his wife and his niece. In *In His Own Country*, Bill, a newspaperman, becomes obsessed with being the Thomas Aquinas of his day and withdraws completely from his wife and reality.

These compelling and unusual stories, originally published in 1928, display all Morley Callaghan's usual skill in revealing human nature and the ironies of everyday life, and are essential to a full appreciation and understanding of his writing.

Cover illustration by Annalee Orr